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STANDARD PAPERS

WILLIAM MAGINN, LONDON

NEW EDITION



LONDON:

WILLIAM MAGINN, NEW BURLINGTON STREET

1864.

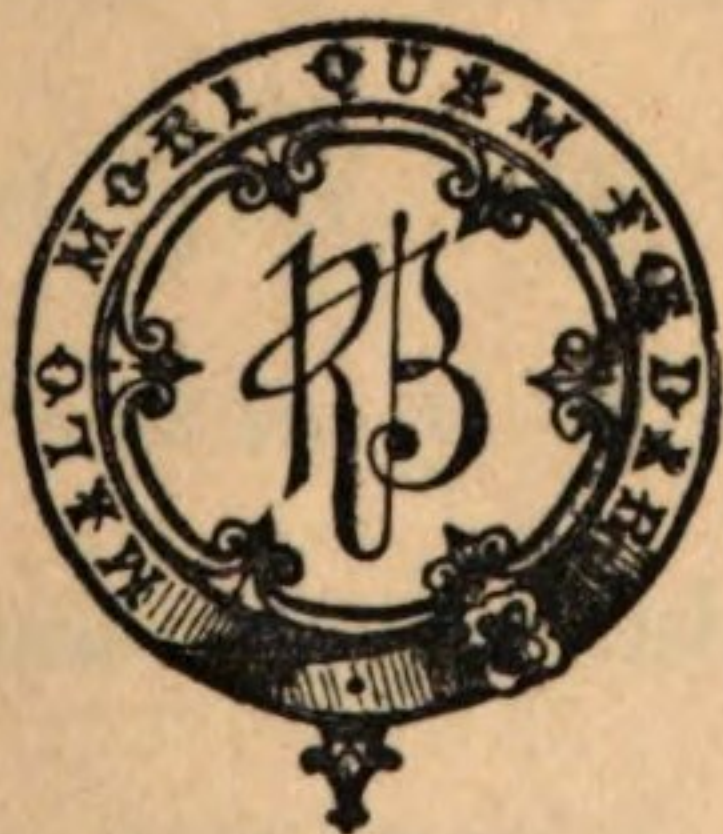
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SHAKSPEARE PAPERS.

BY

WILLIAM MAGINN, L.L.D.

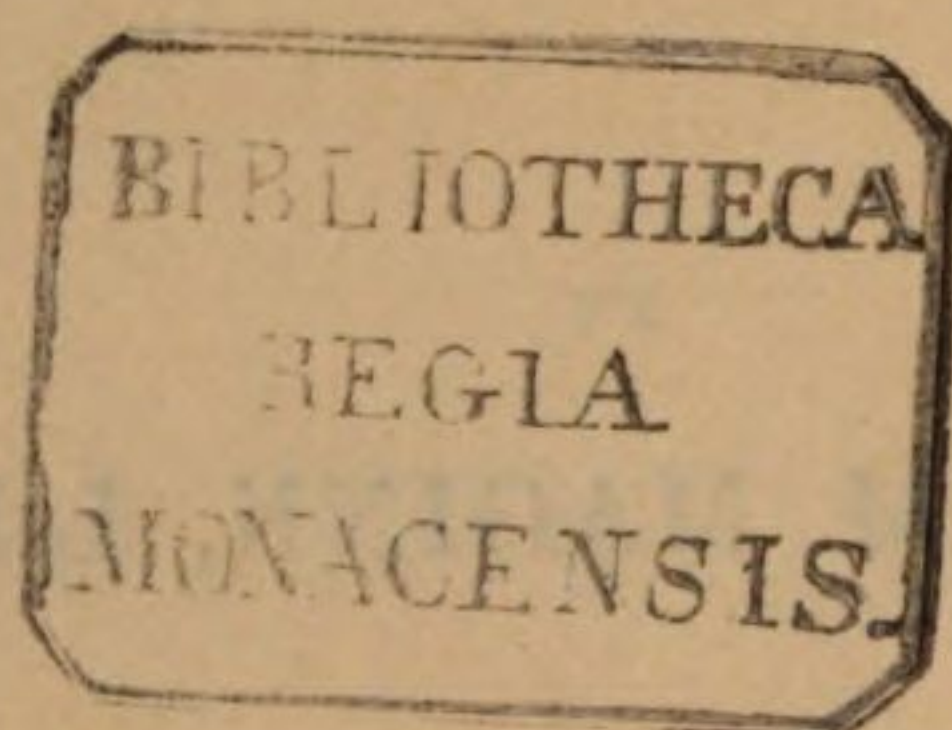
NEW EDITION.



LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1860.



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ADVERTISEMENT
TO THE
SECOND EDITION.

THE “Shakspeare Papers” were originally published in *Bentley’s Miscellany*, with the exception of the paper on Hamlet, which appeared in *Fraser’s Magazine*, and which was not included in the First Edition of this work published in September of last year. By the courtesy of Messrs. J. W. PARKER & SON, the proprietors of *Fraser’s Magazine*, the publisher of the “Shakspeare Papers” is now enabled to give the public a complete Edition.

LONDON,

JANUARY 1860.

NOTICE

TO THE

READERS OF THE

- I. The first edition of this work was published in 1840.
- II. The second edition of this work was published in 1845.
- III. The third edition of this work was published in 1850.
- IV. The fourth edition of this work was published in 1855.
- V. The fifth edition of this work was published in 1860.
- VI. The sixth edition of this work was published in 1865.
- VII. The seventh edition of this work was published in 1870.
- VIII. The eighth edition of this work was published in 1875.
- IX. The ninth edition of this work was published in 1880.
- X. The tenth edition of this work was published in 1885.

JANUARY 1880.

- I. SIR JOHN FALSTAFF.
- II. JAQUES.
- III. ROMEO.
- IV. MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM—BOTTOM THE
WEAVER.
- V. HIS LADIES—LADY MACBETH.
- VI. TIMON OF ATHENS.
- VII. POLONIUS.
- VIII. IAGO.
- IX. HAMLET.

I. John F. Kennedy

II. Adams

III. Roosevelt

IV. Massachusetts House of Representatives

V. Governor

VI. The Senate

VII. The House

VIII. The President

IX. The Vice President

X. The Supreme Court

XI. The Federal Reserve Board

XII. The Federal Reserve Bank

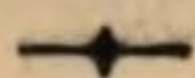
XIII. The Federal Reserve Bank

XIV. The Federal Reserve Bank

XV. The Federal Reserve Bank

XVI. The Federal Reserve Bank

SKETCH OF DR. MAGINN.



WILLIAM MAGINN was the son of a schoolmaster in Cork, and was born in that city on the 11th of November, 1794. At the early age of ten years he was sent to Trinity College, Dublin, where his precocious talents gave early presage of his future eminence, and he obtained his degree when he was only fourteen years old. From college he returned to Cork, where he assisted his father as a teacher of the classics in the Cork Academy, and at twenty, his father dying, the care of the Academy devolved upon him. He continued to maintain its celebrity for some years, only quitting it for the strong temptation of a literary career. His first writings made their appearance in the *Literary Gazette*, to which he for some time contributed anonymously, at a time when that paper, under the management of William Jerdan, was the leading literary organ of the day. Maginn was accustomed, says Mr. Jerdan, to send me "a perfect shower of varieties; classic paraphrases, anecdotes, illustrations

of famous ancient authors, displaying a vast acquaintance with, and fine appreciation of, them."

He soon became connected with *Blackwood's Magazine*, just then rising into eminence, with the assistance of Lockhart, Wilson, Hogg, and Hamilton. Maginn was a Tory of the old school, one who believed that no good could come from Holland House, and he threw his heart and soul into the pages of the Magazine.

The peculiar quality of his genius, the broad scope of his wit, his practical knowledge of life and human nature, and his thorough insight into political trickery, were indeed brilliantly displayed in the whole series of papers contributed to *Blackwood*, under the sobriquet of Ensign Major O'Doherty. They were sufficient of themselves to make the reputation of the writer, and to establish the popularity of the magazine in which they appeared. Amongst these the "Maxims" attracted the most attention at the time, and have since, we believe, been reprinted in a collected form. Compare these with those of La Rochefoucauld, for genuine humour and pungent ridicule, and Maginn's "Maxims" will assuredly stand the test of comparison. Who has not read, and revelled in, these rich lucubrations, enjoying their fun if not always convinced by their logic?

The rapidity with which Maginn composed in any of the various languages of which he was master, was as miraculous as the memory of Magliabechi. It is a well-known fact, that his paraphrase of *Chevy Chase*, in Latin verse, nearly a literal rendering in the same number of lines, was dashed off *currente calamo* after supper, almost as quickly as an ordinary pen could transcribe the original.

To *Blackwood*, also, he contributed some of those exquisite songs which for facility of rhyme and rollicking drollery have never been surpassed.*

Coming to London—to which Maginn was ever after as much attached as Dr. Johnson—he assisted, for a brief season, Theodore Hook on the *John Bull*.

In 1826, Mr. Murray started the *Representative*, and by Lockhart's influence Maginn was appointed Paris correspondent, the present Benjamin Disraeli, then almost a boy, having been appointed editor. In

* In the American reprint of Maginn's works, there is an error which may be noted here:—"Charming Judy Callaghan" is there printed as the production of Dr. Maginn, whilst, in fact, it proceeded from the pen of Father Prout, and was written for *Bentley's Miscellany*. Father Prout was Maginn's only rival in these masterly songs, and they both seemed to wield the Latin and Greek languages with as much facility and felicity as their own.

spite of lavish expenditure, this paper did not succeed, and Maginn returned to England, having, whilst in Paris, written a novel, still unpublished, which has for some years been in the possession of Mr. Bentley, and in which some of the most stirring scenes of that great modern convulsion, the French Revolution, are vividly depicted. His next work of any moment was *The Days of George the Fourth*, in which, by the way, the King was never once introduced.

After some other comparatively trifling productions, we find him one of the writers of the *Noctes Ambrosianæ*, in *Blackwood*, to which he contributed for some time, his last appearance at the *Noctes* being in July 1829.

When the Tories had resolved to organize an opposition to Mr. Canning, they cast about for an organ of sufficient weight to effect their purpose, and finally fixed upon the *Standard*, of which Dr. Giffard was then editor, and which Dr. Maginn powerfully assisted by his keen wit and biting sarcasm.

In 1829, in consequence of a rupture with Mr. Blackwood, he projected, in concert with Mr. Hugh Fraser, *Fraser's Magazine*. The first number appeared in February 1830, and was distinguished by a trenchant sarcasm, which immediately enabled that

periodical to cut its way to success. One of the most humorous papers written by Maginn appeared in this periodical under the title of "The Election of Editor." The election was supposed to take place in Lincoln's Inn Fields, the chairman having the use of "the incomparable balcony of Mr. Soane." Various writers of eminence put in their claim to be editors, and this afforded Maginn an opportunity to imitate their style of speaking with a happiness and humour indescribable. Coleridge commences with a long poem, which produces such a sensation, that in order to quiet the disturbance martial law is proclaimed. Dr. Croly next delivers himself of a long, turgid speech, and is succeeded by Coleridge, who informs the public that when he "was editor of the *Morning Post*, the Emperor Napoleon said that he declared war solely on his account!" Gillies' manner is admirably imitated, although of late years he finished his sentences, even in the most ordinary conversation, so elaborately, that Maginn's picture is rather within the fact than overcharged. Poor Gillies has gone from among us unpensioned, though so many with less desert and far less need, but with friends at court, had their claims attended to. He was a sort of Dominie Sampson, and had no idea whatever of the value of

money. Numberless amusing anecdotes have been related of him, and of his similarity to Goldsmith in this respect. On one occasion he took a cab from Kensington to the West End, to borrow five shillings, and returned home in the same conveyance. This must have been one of the most expensive loans on record, and must have cost at least three-fifths of the borrowed money. He died in great poverty, in Holland Street, Kensington, in November 1858, and no newspaper recorded his death.

It was in the pages of *Fraser*, or *Regina* as was then the fashion to call it, that Maginn wrote the criticism on *Berkeley Castle*, certainly after the third bowl. The reviewer exceeded all the license of criticism, and provoked a cruel retaliation, which fell upon the unfortunate publisher. Maginn and poor Fraser are both gone, and Mr. Grantley Berkeley alone remains to regret to the close of life an act no man living can defend.

In the autumn of 1836, Mr. Bentley projected his Miscellany, and gathered together a host of celebrities, amongst whom were found Father Prout, Theodore Hook, Charles Dickens, Maxwell, Peacock, Morier, Dr. Maginn, and the immortal Ingoldsby. With such a phalanx of talent success was certain under the

editorship of Charles Dickens, and Dr. Maginn contributed some of his happiest papers to the earlier numbers. Chief amongst these are "The Shakspeare Papers," here reproduced, and the two following poems.

"OUR OPENING CHAUNT.

I.

"Come round and hear, my public dear,
Come hear, and judge it gently,—
The prose so terse, and flowing verse,
Of us, the wits of Bentley.

II.

"We offer not intricate plot
To muse upon intently ;
No tragic word, no bloody sword,
Shall stain the page of Bentley.

III.

"The tender song which all day long
Resounds so sentiment'ly,
Through wood and grove all full of love,
Will find no place in Bentley.

IV.

"Nor yet the speech which fain would teach
All nations eloquently ;—
'Tis quite too grand for us, the bland
And modest men of Bentley.

V.

“For science deep no line we keep,
We speak it reverently;—
From sign to sign the sun may shine,
Untelescoped by Bentley.

VI.

“Tory and Whig, in accents big,
May wrangle violently;
Their party rage shan't stain the page—
The neutral page of Bentley.

VII.

“The scribe whose pen is mangling men
And women pestilently,
May take elsewhere his wicked ware,—
He finds no mart in Bentley.

VIII.

“It pains us not to mark the spot
Where Dan may find his rént lie;
The Glasgow chiel may shout for Peel,
We know them not in Bentley.

IX.

“Those who admire a merry lyre,—
Those who would hear attently
A tale of wit, or flashing hit,—
Are ask'd to come to Bentley.

x.

“Our hunt will be for grace and glee,
Where thickest may the scent lie;
At slashing pace begins the chase—
Now for the burst of Bentley.”

In quite a different vein, though written for the same periodical, are the following noble stanzas, which are certainly worthy of being reprinted here.

“THE MOCKINGS OF THE SOLDIERS.

“FROM ST. MATTHEW.

“Plant a crown upon his head,
Royal robe around him spread;
See that his imperial hand
Grasps as fit the sceptral wand:
Then before him bending low,
As becomes his subjects, bow;
Fenced within our armed ring,
Hail him, hail him, as our King!

“Platted was of thorns the crown,
Trooper's cloak was royal gown;
If his passive hand, indeed,
Grasp'd a sceptre, 'twas a reed.
He was bound to feel and hear
Deeds of shame, and words of jeer;
For he whom king in jest they call
Was a doomed captive scoff'd by all.

“ But the brightest crown of gold,
Or the robe of rarest fold,
Or the sceptre which the mine
Of Golconda makes to shine,
Or the lowliest homage given
By all mankind under heaven,
Were prized by him no more than scorn,
Sceptre of reed or crown of thorn.

“ Of the stars his crown is made,
In the sun he is array'd,
He the lightning of the spheres
As a flaming sceptre bears :
Bend in rapture before him
Ranks of glowing seraphim ;
And we, who spurn'd him, trembling stay
The Judgment of his coming day.”

Dr. Maginn contributed to *Fraser* for some time after the publication of *Bentley's Miscellany*, and his “Homeric Ballads,” which have earned for him so great a reputation for scholarship, first appeared in 1838 in that Magazine. His health, however, failing fast, chiefly in consequence it is to be feared of the mode of life he led in the metropolis, he withdrew into the country, and became for a short time editor of the *Lancashire Herald*. In 1842 he was for a short

time imprisoned in the Fleet, but was soon set at liberty. Some of his last contributions were made to *Punch*, in the course of the same year, but it was evident to all that his health was fatally undermined, and he died in August 1842, in his forty-ninth year, and was buried in the picturesque little village of Walton-on-Thames, leaving behind him a wife, one son, and two daughters.

It may appear contradictory to those who are acquainted with the stinging sarcasm of Dr. Maginn, but it is not the less true, that he never wrote maliciously. Master as he was of sarcasm and irony, he delighted in the use of his weapons, and took a pride in keeping them bright at the expense of the first comer who laid himself open to criticism. Beyond this, he rarely mixed feeling up with any of his attacks, and in a paper in *Fraser*, called "The Philosophy of Laughter," he thus hopes to end life:—

"May we die the death of old Democritus, cheerful, hopeful, and contented; surrounded by many a friend, but without an enemy; and remembered principally, because we have never, either in life or death, given pain for a moment to any one that lived."

Maginn's spirits in early life were unbounded, and discover themselves in all his earlier productions. In

society he was as agreeable and genial as he was brilliant and witty. In his own words he was "a whiskey-devouring Irishman," "a rollicking jig of an Irishman." In literature, with the single exception of Father Prout, the twinkle of whose eye still gladdens our hearts, (long may it do so!) William Maginn has left no successor.

His knowledge of languages almost transcends belief. Mr. Shelton Mackenzie, in his able Memoir, prefixed to an American Edition of Maginn's Works, tells us that "he could speak and write German, Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and modern Greek with as much ease as if each had been his mother tongue; and he subsequently mastered Swedish, Russian, and the Basque dialect, besides having some acquaintance with the Turkish and Magyar tongues." He was so absolutely master of Greek and Latin, that he rhymed in them with the same facility as he did in English.

Indeed he had many fine genial qualities which, added to his wit, caused his society to be eagerly sought for. To this circumstance may be fairly imputed the indulgence of habits, which eventually brought his brilliant career to a premature end. Dr. Macnish, the modern Pythagorean, dined with him on

one occasion at the Salopian, and recorded the dinner in the following sketch :—

“ He is a most remarkable fellow. His flow of ideas is incredibly quick, and his articulation so rapid, that it is difficult to follow him. He is altogether a person of vast acuteness, celerity of apprehension, and indefatigable activity both of body and mind. His forehead is very finely developed, his organ of language and ideality large, and his reasoning faculties excellent. His hair is quite grey, although he does not look more than forty. I imagined he was much older-looking, and that he wore a wig. While conversing, his eye is never a moment at rest; in fact his whole body is in motion, and he keeps scrawling grotesque figures upon the paper before him, and rubbing them out again as fast as he draws them.”

The following brief sketch of Dr. Maginn by Mr. Edward Kenealy, one of his latest and best friends, affords a sad and touching picture of Maginn's last Sunday :—

“ On the Sunday before he died, Maginn had been remarkably cheerful, eloquent, and witty. These qualities, indeed, he possessed to the last; but I had often seen him in health when he was not so brilliant as now in his setting, and within a brief space of the twilight

of death. During the day he had related innumerable stories of all the great writers with whom he had lived in intimacy; had talked about books and men with that mingled vein of humour and philosophy which was the great ornament of his conversation; and had amused himself in detailing one of those literary projects on which his mind was always running, but which, alas! were never fated to be fulfilled. Death had not at any time entered into his discourse; apparently he sought to keep it altogether out of his thoughts. Though so weak as to require to be lifted in my arms across the room, he seemed to think dissolution by no means near; or if he knew that he was dying, he certainly bore it with a philosophy that would have immortalized his name in the days of Socrates and Cato. About four o'clock I left him for an hour or two, when he slept, and I returned to him in the evening. He was then up, propped by pillows in an arm chair, and as gay and intelligent as if he had never been ill. After we had talked a short while, 'Kenealy,' said he, 'shall I take some work out of you?' I, of course, assented; and having got some paper and ink, I sat down opposite to him. He then took Homer in his hand; and, after a brief interval of thought, dictated the latter part of the ballad bearing the name of

Nestor's First Essay in Arms, evidently with no mental labour, but with an ease that could have resulted only from his intimacy with the Greek, and his extraordinary power of versification."

Dr. Maginn was always original, and like all men whose intellect is subtle and acute, he was sometimes paradoxical. By some writers, indeed, he has been compared to Elia, and has been said to share with him a great dislike to walk in traditionary paths. Like the Laras he had a strong relish for rebellion.

The great characteristics of his genius are perhaps more favorably discovered in "The Shakspeare Papers" than in any other of his productions. Before writing these Essays, Dr. Maginn would appear to have sat at the feet of Shakspeare, as at the feet of a Gamaliel, and in a loving reverent spirit has vindicated some of Shakspeare's Characters from those decisions of criticism which age had almost converted into dogmas. His defence of Falstaff against Dr. Johnson is in some respects singularly happy; though it is precisely in this Essay that Maginn's daring genius sallying forth to scatter the arguments of Johnson, is most liable to adverse criticism.

Both Hazlitt and Maginn seem to have been desirous of wiping away the reproach, that it was "reserved for

a foreign critic to give reasons for the faith which we English have in Shakspeare." Schlegel's admirable criticism was for some time the only reply of any note to Dr. Johnson's remarks; Hazlitt certainly did away with that reproach, but the readers of the following Essays on some of Shakspeare's Characters, will doubtless be of opinion that Dr. Maginn's views are entirely original, and bring to light, or, at least, give a brighter hue to many of those beauties in our great Dramatist and Poet which have escaped previous commentators.

β.

LONDON,

JANUARY 1860.

SIR JOHN FALSTAFF.



“For those who read aright are well aware
 That Jaques, sighing in the forest green,
 Oft on his heart felt less the load of care
 Than Falstaff, revelling his rough mates between.”

MS. penes me.

“JACK FALSTAFF to my familiars!”—By that name, therefore, must he be known by all persons, for all are now the familiars of Falstaff. The title of “Sir John Falstaff to all Europe” is but secondary and parochial. He has long since far exceeded the limit by which he bounded the knowledge of his knighthood; and in wide-spreading territories, which in the day of his creation were untrodden by human foot, and in teeming realms where the very name of England was then unheard of, Jack Falstaff is known as familiarly as he was to the wonderful court of princes, beggars, judges, swindlers, heroes, bullies, gentlemen, scoundrels, justices, thieves, knights, tapsters, and the rest whom he drew about him.

It is indeed *his* court. He is lord paramount, the *suzerain* to whom all pay homage. Prince Hal may delude himself into the notion that he, the heir of

England, with all the swelling emotions of soul that rendered him afterwards the conqueror of France, makes a butt of the ton of man that is his companion. The parts are exactly reversed. In the peculiar circle in which they live, the prince is the butt of the knight. He knows it not,—he would repel it with scorn if it were asserted; but it is nevertheless the fact that he is subdued. He calls the course of life which he leads, the unyoked humour of his idleness; but he mistakes. In all the paths where his journey lies with Falstaff, it is the hard-yoked servitude of his obedience. In the soliloquies put into his mouth he continually pleads that his present conduct is but that of the moment, that he is ashamed of his daily career, and that the time is ere long to come which will show him different from what he seems. As the dramatic character of Henry V. was conceived and executed by a man who knew how genius in any department of human intellect would work,—to say nothing of the fact that Shakspeare wrote with the whole of the prince's career before him,—we may consider this subjugation to Falstaff as intended to represent the transition state from spoiled youth to energetic manhood. It is useless to look for minute traces of the historical Henry

in these dramas. Tradition and the chronicles had handed him down to Shakspeare's time as a prince dissipated in youth, and freely sharing in the rough debaucheries of the metropolis. The same vigour "that did affright the air at Agincourt," must have marked his conduct and bearing in any tumult in which he happened to be engaged. I do not know on what credible authority the story of his having given Gascoigne a box on the ear for committing one of his friends to prison may rest, and shall not at present take the trouble of inquiring. It is highly probable that the chief justice amply deserved the cuffing, and I shall always assume the liberty of doubting that he committed the prince. That, like a "sensible lord," he should have hastened to accept any apology which should have relieved him from a collision with the ruling powers at court, I have no doubt at all, from a long consideration of the conduct and history of chief justices in general.

More diligent searchers into the facts of that obscure time have seen reason to disbelieve the stories of any serious dissipations of Henry. Engaged as he was from his earliest youth in affairs of great importance, and with a mind trained to the prospect of powerfully acting in the most serious questions

that could agitate his time,—a disputed succession, a rising hostility to the church, divided nobility, turbulent commons, an internecine war with France impossible of avoidance, a web of European diplomacy just then beginning to develope itself, in consequence of the spreading use of the pen and inkhorn so pathetically deplored by Jack Cade, and forerunning the felonious invention, “contrary to the king’s crown and dignity,” of the printing-press, denounced with no regard to chronology by that illustrious agitator:—in these circumstances, the heir of the house of Lancaster, the antagonist of the Lollards,—a matter of accident in his case, though contrary to the general principles of his family,—and at the same time suspected by the churchmen of dangerous designs against their property,—the pretender on dubious title, but not at the period appearing so decidedly defective as it seems in ours, to the throne of France,—the aspirant to be arbiter or master of all that he knew of Europe,—could not have wasted all his youth in riotous living. In fact, his historical character is stern and severe; but with that we have here nothing to do. It is not the Henry of battles, and treaties, and charters, and commissions, and par-

liaments, we are now dealing with ;—we look to the Henry of Shakspeare.

That Henry, I repeat, is subject and vassal of Falstaff. He is bound by the necromancy of genius to the “white-bearded Satan,” who he feels is leading him to perdition. It is in vain that he thinks it utterly unfitting that he should engage in such an enterprise as the robbery at Gadshill ; for, in spite of all protestations to the contrary, he joins the expedition merely to see how his master will get through his difficulty. He struggles hard, but to no purpose. Go he must, and he goes accordingly. A sense of decorum keeps him from participating in the actual robbery ; but he stands close by, that his resistless sword may aid the dubious valour of his master’s associates. Joining with Poins in the jest of scattering them and seizing their booty, not only is no harm done to Falstaff, but a sense of remorse seizes on the prince for the almost treasonable deed—

“Falstaff sweats to death,
And lards the lean earth as he walks along ;
Wer’t not for laughing, *I should pity him.*”

At their next meeting, after detecting and exposing

the stories related by the knight, how different is the result from what had been predicted by Poins when laying the plot! "The virtue of this jest will be, the incomprehensible lies that this same fat rogue will tell us when we meet at supper: how thirty, at least, he fought with; what wards, what blows, what extremities he endured; and in the reproof of this lies the jest." Reproof indeed! All is detected and confessed. Does Poins *reprove* him, interpret the word as we will? Poins indeed! That were *lèse-majesté*. Does the prince? Why, he tries a jest, but it breaks down; and Falstaff victoriously orders sack and merriment with an accent of command not to be disputed. In a moment after he is selected to meet Sir John Bracy, sent special with the villainous news of the insurrection of the Percies; and in another moment he is seated on his joint-stool, the mimic King of England, lecturing with a mixture of jest and earnest the real Prince of Wales.

Equally inevitable is the necessity of screening the master from the consequences of his delinquencies, even at the expense of a very close approximation to saying the thing that is not; and impossible does Hal find it not to stand rebuked when the conclusion of his joke of taking the tavern-bills from the sleeper

behind the arras is the enforced confession of being a pickpocket. Before the austere king his father, John his sober-blooded brother, and other persons of gravity or consideration, if Falstaff be in presence, the prince is constrained by his star to act in defence and protection of the knight. Conscious of the carelessness and corruption which mark all the acts of his guide, philosopher, and friend, it is yet impossible that he should not recommend him to a command in a civil war which jeopardied the very existence of his dynasty. In the heat of the battle and the exultation of victory he is obliged to yield to the fraud that represents Falstaff as the actual slayer of Hotspur. Prince John quietly remarks, that the tale of Falstaff is the strangest that he ever heard: his brother, who has won the victory, is content with saying that he who has told it is the strangest of fellows. Does he betray the cheat? Certainly not,—it would have been an act of disobedience; but in privy council he suggests to *his* prince in a whisper,

“Come, bring your luggage [the body of Hotspur] *nobly*—”

nobly—as becomes your rank in *our* court, so as to do the whole of your followers, myself included, honour by the appearance of their master—

“Come, bring your luggage nobly on your back :
For my part, if a lie may do thee grace,
I'll gild it with the happiest terms I have.”

Tribute, this, from the future Henry V. ! Deeper tribute, however, is paid in the scene in which state necessity induces the renunciation of the fellow with the great belly who had misled him. Poins had prepared us for the issue. The prince had been grossly abused in the reputable hostelrie of the Boar's Head while he was thought to be out of hearing. When he comes forward with the intention of rebuking the impertinence, Poins, well knowing the command to which he was destined to submit, exclaims, “My lord, he will drive you out of your revenge, and turn all to merriment, if you take not the heat.” Vain caution ! The scene, again, ends by the total forgetfulness of Falstaff's offence, and his being sent for to court. When, therefore, the time had come that considerations of the highest importance required that Henry should assume a more dignified character, and shake off his dissolute companions, his own experience and the caution of Poins instruct him that if the thing be not done on the heat—if the old master-spirit be allowed one moment's ground of vantage—the game is up, the good resolutions dissipated into thin air,

the grave rebuke turned all into laughter, and thoughts of anger or prudence put to flight by the restored supremacy of Falstaff. Unabashed and unterrified he has heard the severe rebuke of the king—"I know thee not, old man," &c., until an opportunity offers for a repartee :

" Know, the grave doth gape
For thee thrice wider than for other men."

Some joke on the oft-repeated theme of his unwieldy figure was twinkling in Falstaff's eye, and ready to leap from his tongue. The king saw his danger : had he allowed a word, he was undone. Hastily, therefore, does he check that word ;

" Reply not to me with a fool-born jest ;"

forbidding, by an act of eager authority,—what he must also have felt to be an act of self-control,—the outpouring of those magic sounds which, if uttered, would, instead of a prison becoming the lot of Falstaff, have conducted him to the coronation dinner, and established him as chief depository of what in after-days was known by the name of backstairs influence.

In this we find the real justification of what has generally been stigmatized as the harshness of Henry.

Dr. Johnson, with some indignation, asks why should Falstaff be sent to the Fleet?—he had done nothing since the king's accession to deserve it. I answer, he was sent to the Fleet for the same reason that he was banished ten miles from court, on pain of death. Henry thought it necessary that the walls of a prison should separate him from the seducing influence of one than whom he knew many a better man, but none whom it was so hard to miss. He felt that he could not, in his speech of predetermined severity, pursue to the end the tone of harshness towards his old companion. He had the nerve to begin by rebuking him in angry terms as a surfeit-swelled, profane old man,—as one who, instead of employing in prayer the time which his hoary head indicated was not to be of long duration in this world, disgraced his declining years by assuming the unseemly occupations of fool and jester,—as one whom he had known in a dream, but had awakened to despise,—as one who, on the verge of the gaping grave, occupied himself in the pursuits of such low debauchery as excluded him from the society of those who had respect for themselves or their character. But he cannot so continue; and the last words he addresses to him whom he had intended to have cursed altogether, hold forth a promise of advancement, with an affectionate assurance

that it will be such as is suitable to his “strength and qualities.” If in public he could scarce master his speech, how could he hope in private to master his feelings? No. His only safety was in utter separation: it should be done, and he did it. He was emancipated by violent effort; did he never regret the ancient thralldom? Shakspeare is silent: but may we not imagine that he who sate crowned with the golden rigol of England, cast, amid all his splendours, many a sorrowful thought upon that old familiar face which he had sent to gaze upon the iron bars of the Fleet?

As for the chief justice, he never appears in Falstaff’s presence, save as a butt. His grave lordship has many solemn admonitions, nay, serious threats to deliver; but he departs laughed at and baffled. Coming to demand explanation of the affair at Gadshill, the conversation ends with his being asked for the loan of a thousand pounds. Interposing to procure payment of the debt to Dame Quickly, he is told that she goes about the town saying that her eldest son resembles him. Fang and Snare, his lordship’s officers, are not treated with less respect, or shaken off with less ceremony. As for the other followers of the knight,—Pistol, Nym, Bardolph,—they are, by office, his obsequious dependents. But it is impossible that they could

long hang about him without contracting, unknown even to themselves, other feelings than those arising from the mere advantages they derived from his service. Death is the test of all ; and when that of Falstaff approaches, the dogged Nym reproaches the king for having run bad humours on the knight ; and Pistol in swelling tone, breathing a sigh over his heart “fracted and corroborate,” hastens to condole with him. Bardolph wishes that he was with him wheresoever he has gone, whether to heaven or hell : he has followed him all his life,—why not follow him in death ? The last jest has been at his own expense ; but what matters it now ? In other times Bardolph could resent the everlasting merriment at the expense of his nose—he might wish it in the belly of the jester ; but that’s past. The dying knight compares a flea upon his follower’s nose to a black soul burning in hell-fire ; and no remonstrance is now made. “Let him joke as he likes,” says and thinks Bardolph with a sigh, “the fuel is gone that maintained that fire. He never will supply it more ; nor will it, in return, supply fuel for his wit. I wish that it could.” And Quickly, whom he had for nine and twenty years robbed and cheated,—pardon me, I must retract the words,—from whom he had, for the space of a generation, levied tax and tribute as

matter of right and due,—she hovers anxiously over his dying bed, and, with a pathos and a piety well befitting her calling, soothes his departing moments by the consolatory assurance, when she hears him uttering the unaccustomed appeal to God, that he had no necessity for yet troubling himself with thoughts to which he had been unused during the whole length of their acquaintance. Blame her not for leaving unperformed the duty of a chaplain : it was not her vocation. She consoled him as she could,—and the kindest of us can do no more.

Of himself, the centre of the circle, I have, perhaps, delayed too long to speak ; but the effect which he impresses upon all the visionary characters around, marks Shakspeare's idea that he was to make a similar impression on the real men to whom he was transmitting him. The temptation to represent the gross fat man upon the stage as a mere buffoon, and to turn the attention of the spectators to the corporal qualities and the practical jests of which he is the object, could hardly be resisted by the players ; and the popular notion of the Falstaff of the stage is, that he is no better than an upper-class Scapin. A proper consideration, not merely of the character of his mind as displayed in the lavish abundance of ever ready wit, and the sound good sense

of his searching observation, but of the position which he always held in society, should have freed the Falstaff of the cabinet from such an imputation. It has not generally done so. Nothing can be more false, nor, *pace tanti viri*, more unphilosophical, than Dr. Johnson's critique upon his character. According to him.

“Falstaff is a character loaded with faults, and with those faults which naturally produce contempt. He is a thief and a glutton, a coward and a boaster, always ready to cheat the weak, and prey upon the poor; to terrify the timorous, and insult the defenceless. At once obsequious and malignant, he satirizes in their absence those whom he lives by flattering. He is familiar with the prince only as an agent of vice, but of this familiarity he is so proud, as not only to be supercilious and haughty with common men, but to think his interest of importance to the Duke of Lancaster. Yet the man thus corrupt, thus despicable, makes himself necessary to the prince that despises him, by the most pleasing of all qualities, perpetual gaiety; by an un-failing power of exciting laughter, which is the more freely indulged, as his wit is not of the splendid or ambitious kind, but consists in easy scapes and sallies of levity, which make sport, but raise no envy. It must be observed, that he is stained with no enormous

or sanguinary crimes, so that his licentiousness is not so offensive but that it may be borne for his mirth.

“The moral to be drawn from this representation is, that no man is more dangerous than he that, with a will to corrupt, hath the power to please; and that neither wit nor honesty ought to think themselves safe with such a companion, when they see Henry seduced by Falstaff.”

What can be cheaper than the venting of moral apophthegms such as that which concludes the critique? Shakspeare, who had no notion of copybook ethics, well knew that Falstaffs are not as plenty as blackberries, and that the moral to be drawn from the representation is no more than that great powers of wit will fascinate, whether they be joined or not to qualities commanding grave esteem. In the commentary I have just quoted, the Doctor was thinking of such companions as Savage; but the interval is wide and deep.

How idle is the question as to the cowardice of Falstaff. Maurice Morgann wrote an essay to free his character from the allegation; and it became the subject of keen controversy. Deeply would the knight have derided the discussion. His retreat from before Prince Henry and Poins, and his imitating death when

attacked by Douglas, are the points mainly dwelt upon by those who make him a coward. I shall not minutely go over what I conceive to be a silly dispute on both sides: but in the former case Shakspeare saves his honour by making him offer at least some resistance to two bold and vigorous men when abandoned by his companions; and, in the latter, what fitting antagonist was the fat and blown soldier of three-score for

“ That furious Scot,
The bloody Douglas, whose well-labouring sword
Had three times slain the appearance of the King ? ”

He did no more than what Douglas himself did in the conclusion of the fight: overmatched, the renowned warrior

“ ’Gan vail his stomach, and did grace the shame
Of those that turned their backs; and, in his flight,
Stumbling in fear, was took.”

Why press cowardice on Falstaff more than upon Douglas? In an age when men of all ranks engaged in personal conflict, we find him chosen to a command in a slaughterous battle; he leads his men to posts of imminent peril; it is his sword which Henry wishes to borrow when about to engage Percy, and he refuses to lend it from its necessity to himself; he can jest coolly

in the midst of danger; he is deemed worthy of employing the arm of Douglas at the time that Hotspur engages the prince; Sir John Coleville yields himself his prisoner; and, except in the jocular conversations among his own circle, no word is breathed that he has not performed, and is not ready to perform, the duties of a soldier. Even the attendant of the chief justice, with the assent of his hostile lordship, admits that he has done good service at Shrewsbury. All this, and much more, is urged in his behalf by Maurice Morgann; but it is far indeed from the root of the matter.

Of his being a thief and a glutton I shall say a few words anon; but where does he cheat the weak or prey upon the poor,—where terrify the timorous or insult the defenceless,—where is he obsequious, where malignant,—where is he supercilious and haughty with common men,—where does he think his interest of importance to the Duke of Lancaster? Of this last charge I see nothing whatever in the play. The “Duke” of Lancaster* is a slip of the Doctor’s pen.

* He is once called so by Westmoreland, Second Part of *Henry IV.* Act iv. Sc. 1.

“Health and fair greeting from our general,
The prince Lord John and Duke of Lancaster;”

but it occurs nowhere else, and we must not place much reliance

But Falstaff nowhere extends his patronage to Prince John; on the contrary, he asks from the prince the favour of his good report to the king, adding, when he is alone, that the sober-blooded boy did not love him. He is courteous of manner; but, so far from being obsequious, he assumes the command wherever he goes. He is jocularly satirical of speech: but he who has attached to him so many jesting companions for such a series of years, never could have been open to the reproach of malignity. If the sayings of Johnson himself about Goldsmith and Garrick, for example, were gathered, must he not have allowed them to be far more calculated to hurt their feelings than anything Falstaff ever said of Poins or Hal? and yet would he not recoil from the accusation of being actuated by malignant feelings towards men whom, in spite of wayward conversations, he honoured, admired, and loved?

Let us consider for a moment who and what Falstaff was. If you put him back to the actual era in which his date is fixed, and judge him by the manners of that

on the authenticity or the verbal accuracy of such verses. He was Prince John of Lancaster, and afterwards Duke of Bedford. The king was then, as the king is now, Duke of Lancaster.

time ; a knight of the days perhaps of Edward III.—at all events of Henry IV.—was a man not to be confounded with the knights spawned in our times. A knight then was not far from the rank of peer ; and with peers, merely by the virtue of his knighthood, he habitually associated as their equal. Even if we judge of him by the repute of knights in the days when his character was written,—and in dealing with Shakspeare it is always safe to consider him as giving himself small trouble to depart from the manners which he saw around him,—the knights of Elizabeth were men of the highest class. The queen conferred the honour with much difficulty, and insisted that it should not be disgraced. Sir John Falstaff, if his mirth and wit inclined him to lead a reckless life, held no less rank in the society of the day than the Earl of Rochester in the time of Charles II. Henry IV. disapproves of his son's mixing with the loose revellers of the town ; but admits Falstaff unreprieved to his presence. When he is anxious to break the acquaintance, he makes no objection to the station of Sir John, but sends him with Prince John of Lancaster against the archbishop and the Earl of Northumberland. His objection is not that the knight, by his rank, is no

fitting companion for a son of his own, but that he can better trust him with the steadier than the more mercurial of the brothers.

We find by incidental notices that he was reared, when a boy, page to Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, head of one of the greatest houses that ever was in England, and the personal antagonist of him who was afterwards Henry IV.; that he was in his youth on familiar terms with John of Gaunt, the first man of the land after the death of his father and brother; and that, through all his life, he had been familiar with the lofty and distinguished. We can, therefore, conjecture what had been his youth and his manhood; we see what he actually is in declining age. In this, if I mistake not, will be found the true solution of the character; here is what the French call the *mot d'énigme*. Conscious of powers and talents far surpassing those of the ordinary run of men, he finds himself outstripped in the race. He must have seen many a man whom he utterly despised rising over his head to honours and emoluments. The very persons upon whom, it would appear to Dr. Johnson, he was intruding, were many of them his early companions,—many more his juniors at court. He might have attended his old patron, the duke, at Coventry, upon St.

Lambert's day, when Richard II. flung down the warder amidst the greatest men of England. If he jested in the tilt-yard with John of Gaunt, could he feel that any material obstacle prevented him from mixing with those who composed the court of John of Gaunt's son?

In fact, he is a dissipated man of rank, with a thousand times more wit than ever fell to the lot of all the men of rank in the world. But he has ill played his cards in life. He grumbles not at the advancement of men of his own order; but the bitter drop of his soul overflows when he remembers how he and that cheeseparing Shallow began the world, and reflects that the starveling justice has land and beeves, while he, the wit and the gentleman, is penniless, and living from hand to mouth by the casual shifts of the day. He looks at the goodly dwelling and the riches of him whom he had once so thoroughly contemned, with an inward pang that he has scarcely a roof under which he can lay his head. The tragic Macbeth, in the agony of his last struggle, acknowledges with a deep despair that the things which should accompany old age,—as honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,—he must not look to have. The comic Falstaff says nothing on the subject; but, by the choice of such associates as Bardolph, Pistol, and the rest of that following, he

tacitly declares that he too has lost the advantages which should be attendant on years. No curses loud or deep have accompanied his festive career,—its conclusion is not the less sad on that account: neglect, forgotten friendships, services overlooked, shared pleasures unremembered, and fair occasions gone for ever by, haunt him, no doubt, as sharply as the consciousness of deserving universal hatred galls the soul of Macbeth.

And we may pursue the analogy farther without any undue straining. All other hope lost, the confident tyrant shuts himself up in what he deems an impregnable fortress, and relies for very safety upon his interpretation of the dark sayings of riddling witches. Divested of the picturesque and supernatural horror of the tragedy, Macbeth is here represented as driven to his last resource, and dependent for life only upon chances, the dubiousness of which he can hardly conceal from himself. The Boar's Head in Eastcheap is not the castle of Dunsinane, any more than the conversation of Dame Quickly and Doll Tearsheet is that of the Weird Sisters; but in the comedy, too, we have the man, powerful in his own way, driven to his last "frank," and looking to the chance of the hour for the

living of the hour. Hope after hope has broken down, as prophecy after prophecy has been discovered to be juggling and fallacious. He has trusted that *his* Birnam Wood would not come to Dunsinane, and yet it comes;—that no man not of woman born is to cross his path, and lo! the man is here. What then remains for wit or warrior when all is lost—when the last stake is gone—when no chance of another can be dreamt of—when the gleaming visions that danced before their eyes are found to be nothing but mist and mirage? What remains for them but to die?—And so they do.

With such feelings, what can Falstaff, after having gone through a life of adventure, care about the repute of courage or cowardice? To divert the prince, he engages in a wild enterprise,—nothing more than what would be called a “lark” now. When deer-stealing ranked as no higher offence than robbing orchards,—not indeed so high as the taking a slice off a loaf by a wandering beggar, which some weeks ago has sent the vagrant who committed the “crime” to seven years’ transportation,—such robberies as those at Gadshill, especially as all parties well knew that the money taken there was surely to be repaid, as we find it is in the

end,* were of a comparatively venial nature. Old father antic, the Law, had not yet established his undoubted supremacy; and taking purses, even in the

* *Henry IV.* Part 1. Act iii. Sc. 3.

“*Fal.* Now Hal, to the news at court: for the robbery, lad? How is that answered?

P. Hen. My sweet beef, I must
Still be good angel to thee.
The money is paid back.

Fal. I do not like
That paying back; it is a double labour.

P. Hen. I am good friends with my father, and may do anything.

Fal. Rob me the exchequer, the first thing thou dost;
And do't with unwashed hands too.

Bard. Do, my lord.”

The quiet and business-like manner in which Bardolph enforces on the heir-apparent his master's reasonable proposition of robbing the exchequer, is worthy of that plain and straightforward character. I have always considered it a greater hardship that Bardolph should be hanged “for pix of little price” by an old companion at Gadshill, than that Falstaff should have been banished. But Shakspeare wanted to get rid of the party; and as, in fact, a soldier was hanged in the army of Henry V. for such a theft, the opportunity was afforded. The king is not concerned in the order for his execution however, which is left with the Duke of Exeter.

I have omitted a word or two from the ordinary editions in the above quotation, which are useless to the sense and spoil the metre. A careful consideration of Falstaff's speeches will show, that though they are sometimes printed as prose, they are in almost all cases metrical. Indeed, I do not think that there is much prose in any of Shakspeare's plays.

days of Queen Elizabeth, was not absolutely incompatible with gentility. The breaking up of the great households and families by the wars of the Roses, the suppression of the monasteries and the confiscation of church property by Henry VIII., added to the adventurous spirit generated throughout all Europe by the discovery of America, had thrown upon the world "men of action," as they called themselves, without any resources but what lay in their right hands. Younger members of broken houses, or aspirants for the newly lost honours or the ease of the cloister, did not well know what to do with themselves. They were too idle to dig; they were ashamed to beg;—and why not apply at home the admirable maxim,

"That they should take who have the power,
And they should keep who can,"

which was acted upon with so much success beyond the sea. The same causes which broke down the nobility, and crippled the resources of the church, deprived the retainers of the great baron, and the sharers of the dole of the monastery, of their accustomed mode of living; and robbery in these classes was considered the most venial of offences. To the

system of poor laws,—a system worthy of being projected “in great Eliza’s golden time” by the greatest philosopher of that day, or, with one exception, of any other day,—are we indebted for that general respect for property which renders the profession of a thief infamous, and consigns him to the hulks, or the tread-mill, without compassion. But I must not wander into historical disquisitions; though no subject would, in its proper place, be more interesting than a minute speculation upon the gradual working of the poor-law system on English society. It would form one of the most remarkable chapters in that great work yet to be written, “The History of the *Lowest* Order from the earliest times,”—a work of far more importance, of deeper philosophy, and more picturesque romance, than all the chronicles of what are called the great events of the earth. Elsewhere let me talk of this. I must now get back again to Falstaff.

His Gadshill adventure was a jest,—a jest, perhaps, repeated after too many precedents; but still, according to the fashion and the humour of the time, nothing more than a jest. His own view of such transactions is recorded; he considers Shallow as a fund of jesting to amuse the prince, remarking that it is easy to amuse “with a sad brow” (with a

solemnity of appearance) “a fellow that never had the ache in his shoulders.” What was to be accomplished by turning the foolish justice into ridicule, was also to be done by inducing the true prince to become for a moment a false thief. The serious face of robbery was assumed “to keep Prince Harry in perpetual laughter.” That, in Falstaff’s circumstances, the money obtained by the night’s exploit would be highly acceptable, cannot be doubled; but the real object was to amuse the prince. He had no idea of making an exhibition of bravery on such an occasion; Poins well knew his man when he said beforehand, “As for the third, if he fight longer than he see reason, I’ll forswear arms:” his end was as much obtained by the prince’s jokes upon his cowardice. It was no matter whether he invented what tended to laughter, or whether it was invented upon him. The object was won so the laughter was in any manner excited. The exaggerated tale of the misbegotten knaves in Kendal-green, and his other lies, gross and mountainous, are told with no other purpose; and one is almost tempted to believe him when he says that he knew who were his assailants, and ran for their greater amusement. At all events, it is evident that he cares nothing on the subject. He offers a

jocular defence ; but immediately passes to matter of more importance than the question of his standing or running :

“ But, lads, I’m glad you have the money. Hostess !
Clap to the doors ; watch to-night, pray to-morrow.
Gallants, lads, boys, hearts-o’-gold ! All the titles of
Good fellowship come to you ! ”

The money is had ; the means of enjoying it are at hand. Why waste our time in inquiring how it has been brought here, or permit nonsensical discussions on my valour or cowardice to delay for a moment the jovial appearance of the bottle ?

I see no traces of his being a glutton. His roundness of paunch is no proof of gormandizing propensities ; in fact, the greatest eaters are generally thin and spare. When Henry is running over the bead-roll of his vices, we meet no charge of gluttony urged against him.

“ There is a devil
Haunts thee i’ the likeness of a fat old man ;
A ton of man is thy companion.
Why dost thou converse with that trunk of humours,
That bolting-hutch of beastliness, that swoln parcel of
Dropsies, that huge bombard of sack, that stuffed
Cloakbag of guts, that roasted Manningtree ox
With the pudding in his belly, that reverend vice,

That grey iniquity, that father ruffian,
That vanity in years? Wherein is he good
But to taste sack, and drink it? Wherein neat
And cleanly, but to carve a capon, and eat it?"*

The sack and sugar Falstaff admits readily; of addiction to the grosser pleasure of the table neither he nor his accuser says a word. Capon is light eating; and his neatness in carving gives an impression of delicacy in the observances of the board. He appears to have been fond of capon; for it figures in the tavern-bill found in his pockets as the only eatable beside the stimulant anchovy for supper, and the halfpenny-worth of bread. Nor does his conversation ever turn upon gastronomical topics. The bottle supplies an endless succession of jests; the dish scarcely contributes one.

We must observe that Falstaff is never represented as drunk, or even affected by wine. The copious potations of sack do not cloud his intellect, or embarrass his tongue. He is always self-possessed, and ready to pour forth his floods of acute wit. In this

* This and the foregoing passage also are printed as prose: I have not altered a single letter, and the reader will see not only that they are dramatical blank-verse, but dramatical blank-verse of a very excellent kind. After all the editions of Shakspeare, another is sadly wanted. The text throughout requires a searching critical revision.

he forms a contrast to Sir Toby Belch. The discrimination between these two characters is very masterly. Both are knights, both convivial, both fond of loose or jocular society, both somewhat in advance of their youth—there are many outward points of similitude, and yet they are as distinct as Prospero and Polonius. The Illyrian knight is of a lower class of mind. His jests are mischievous ; Falstaff never commits a practical joke. Sir Toby delights in brawling and tumult ; Sir John prefers the ease of his own inn. Sir Toby sings songs, joins in catches, and rejoices in making a noise ; Sir John knows too well his powers of wit and conversation to think it necessary to make any display, and he hates disturbance. Sir Toby is easily affected by liquor and roystering ; Sir John rises from the board as cool as when he sate down. The knight of Illyria had nothing to cloud his mind ; he never aspired to higher things than he has attained ; he lives a jolly life in the household of his niece, feasting, drinking, singing, rioting, playing tricks from one end of the year to the other : his wishes are gratified, his hopes unblighted. I have endeavoured to show that Falstaff was the contrary of all this. And we must remark that the tumultuous Toby has some dash of romance in him, of which no trace can be

found in the English knight. The wit and grace, the good-humour and good looks of Maria, conquer Toby's heart, and he is in love with her—love expressed in rough fashion, but love sincere. Could we see him some dozen years after his marriage, we should find him sobered down into a respectable, hospitable, and domestic country gentleman, surrounded by a happy family of curly-headed Illyrians, and much fonder of his wife than of his bottle. We can never so consider of Falstaff; he must always be a dweller in clubs and taverns, a perpetual diner-out at gentlemen's parties, or a frequenter of haunts where he will not be disturbed by the presence of ladies of condition or character. In the *Merry Wives of Windsor*,—I may remark, in passing, that the Falstaff of that play is a different conception from the Falstaff of *Henry IV.*, and an inferior one—his love is of a very practical and unromantic nature. The ladies whom he addresses are beyond a certain age; and his passion is inspired by his hopes of making them his East and West Indies,—by their tables and their purses. No; Falstaff never could have married,—he was better “accommodated than with a wife.” He might have paid his court to old Mistress Ursula, and sworn to marry her weekly from the time when

he perceived the first white hair on his chin; but the oath was never kept, and we see what was the motive of his love, when we find him sending her a letter by his page after he has been refused credit by Master Dombledon, unless he can offer something better than the rather unmarketable security of himself and Bardolph.

We must also observe that he never laughs. Others laugh with him, or at him; but no laughter from him who occasions or permits it. He jests with a sad brow. The wit which he profusely scatters about is from the head, not the heart. Its satire is slight, and never malignant or affronting; but still it is satirical, and seldom joyous. It is anything but *fun*. Original genius and long practice have rendered it easy and familiar to him, and he uses it as a matter of business. He has too much philosophy to show that he feels himself misplaced; we discover his feelings by slight indications, which are, however, quite sufficient. I fear that this conception of the character could never be rendered popular on the stage; but I have heard in private the part of Falstaff read with a perfectly grave, solemn, slow, deep, and sonorous voice, touched occasionally somewhat with the broken tone of age, from

beginning to end, with admirable effect. But I can imagine him painted according to my idea. He is always caricatured. Not to refer to ordinary drawings, I remember one executed by the reverend and very clever author of the *Miseries of Human Life*, (an engraving of which, if I do not mistake, used to hang in Ambrose's parlour in Edinburgh, in the actual room which was the primary seat of the *Noctes Ambrosianæ*,) and the painter had exerted all his art in making the face seamed with the deep-drawn wrinkles and lines of a hard drinker and a constant laugh. Now, had jolly Bacchus

“Set the trace in his face that a toper will tell,”

should we not have it carefully noted by those who everlastingly joked upon his appearance? should we not have found his Malmsey nose, his whelks and bubukles, his exhalations and meteors, as duly described as those of Bardolph? A laughing countenance he certainly had not. Jests such as his are not, like Ralph's, “lost, unless you print the face.” The leering wink in the eye introduced into this portraiture is also wrong, if intended to represent the habitual look of the man. The chief justice assures us that his eyes were moist like those of other men of his time of

life ; and, without his lordship's assurance, we may be certain that Falstaff seldom played tricks with them. He rises before me as an elderly and very corpulent gentleman, dressed like other military men of the time, [of Elizabeth, observe, not Henry,] yellow-cheeked, white-bearded, double chinned, with a good-humoured but grave expression of countenance, sensuality in the lower features of his face, high intellect in the upper.

Such is the idea I have formed of Falstaff, and perhaps some may think I am right. It required no ordinary genius to carry such a character through so great a variety of incidents with so perfect a consistency. It is not a difficult thing to depict a man corroded by care within, yet appearing gay and at ease without, if you every moment pull the machinery to pieces, as children do their toys, to show what is inside. But the true art is to let the attendant circumstances bespeak the character, without being obliged to label him : “ *Here you may see the tyrant ;* ” or, “ *Here is the man heavy of heart, light of manner.* ” Your ever-melancholy and ostentatiously broken-hearted heroes are felt to be bores, endurable only on account of the occasional beauty of the poetry in which they figure. We grow tired of “ the gloom the fabled

Hebrew wanderer wore," &c., and sympathize as little with perpetual lamentations over mental sufferings endured, or said to be endured, by active youth and manhood, as we should be with its ceaseless complaints of the physical pain of corns or toothache. The death-bed of Falstaff, told in the *patois* of Dame Quickly to her debauched and profligate auditory, is a thousand times more pathetic to those who have looked upon the world with reflective eye, than all the morbid mournings of Childe Harold and his poetical progeny.

At the table of Shallow, laid in his arbour, Falstaff is compelled by the eager hospitality of his host to sit, much against his will. The wit of the court endures the tipsy garrulity of the prattling justice, the drunken harmonies of Silence, whose tongue is loosed by the sack to chaunt butt-ends of old-fashioned ballads, the bustling awkwardness of Davy, and the long-known ale-house style of conversation of Bardolph, without uttering a word except some few phrases of commonplace courtesy. He feels that he is in mind and thought far above his company. Was that the only company in which the same accident had befallen him? Certainly not; it had befallen him in many a mansion more honoured than that of Shallow, and amid society

loftier in name and prouder in place. His talent and the use to which he had turned it, had as completely disjoined him in heart from those among whom he mixed, or might have mixed, as it did from the pippin-and-caraway-eating party in Gloucestershire. The members of his court are about him, but not of him; they are all intended for use. From Shallow he borrows a thousand pounds; and, as the justice cannot appreciate his wit, he wastes it not upon him, but uses other methods of ingratiating himself. Henry delights in his conversation and manner, and therefore all his fascinations are exerted to win the favour of one from whom so many advantages might be expected. He lives in the world alone and apart, so far as true community of thought with others is concerned; and his main business in life is to get through the day. That—the day—is his real enemy; he rises to fight it in the morning; he gets through its various dangers as well as he can; some difficulties he meets, some he avoids; he shuns those who ask him for money, seeks those from whom he may obtain it; lounges here, bustles there; talks, drinks, jokes, schemes; and at last his foe is slain, when light and his troubles depart. “The day is gone—the night’s our own.” Courageously has he put an end to one of the three

hundred and sixty-five tormentors which he has yearly to endure; and to-morrow—why—as was to-day, so to-morrow shall be. At all events I shall not leave the sweet of the night un-picked, to think anything more about it. Bring me a cup of sack! Let us be merry! Does he ever think of what were his hopes and prospects at the time, when was

“Jack Falstaff, now Sir John, a boy,
And page to Thomas Mowbray, duke of Norfolk?”

Perhaps!——but he chases away the intrusive reflection by another cup of sack and a fresh sally of humour.

Dryden maintained that Shakspeare killed Mercutio, because, if he had not, Mercutio would have killed him. In spite of the authority of

“All those prefaces of Dryden,
For these our critics much confide in,”

Glorious John is here mistaken. Mercutio is killed precisely in the part of the drama where his death is requisite. Not an incident, scarcely a sentence, in this most skilfully managed play of *Romeo and Juliet*, can be omitted or misplaced. But I do think that Shakspeare was unwilling to hazard the reputation of

Falstaff by producing him again in connexion with his old companion, Hal, on the stage. The dancer in the epilogue of the Second part of *Henry IV.* promises the audience, that “if you be not too much cloyed with fat meat, our humble author will continue the story, with Sir John in it, and make you merry with fair Katherine of France: where for anything I know, Falstaff shall die of a sweat, unless already he be killed with your hard opinions.”* The audience was not cloyed with fat meat, Sir John was not killed with their hard opinions; he was popular from the first hour of his appearance: but Shakspeare never kept his word. It was the dramatist, not the public, who

* I consider this Epilogue to be in blank-verse,—

“First my fear, then my courtesy, then my speech,” &c.
but some slight alterations should be made: the transposition of a couple of words will make the passage here quoted metrical.

“One word more I beseech you. If you be not
Too much cloyed with fat meat, our humble author
The story will continue with Sir John in ’t,
And make you merry with fair *Kate* of France. Where
(For any thing I know) Falstaff shall die of
A sweat, unless already he be killed with
Your hard opinions; Oldcastle died a martyr,
And this is not the man.
My tongue is weary, when my legs are too,
I’ll bid you good-night; and kneel down before you,
But indeed to pray for the queen.”

killed his hero in the opening scenes of *Henry V.*; for he knew not how to interlace him with the story of Agincourt. There Henry was to be lord of all; and it was matter of necessity that his old master should disappear from the scene. He parted therefore even just between twelve and one, e'en at turning of the tide, and we shall never see him again until the waters of some Avon, here or elsewhere,—it is a good Celtic name for rivers in general,—shall once more bathe the limbs of the like of him who was laid for his last earthly sleep under a grave-stone bearing a disregarded inscription, on the north side of the chancel in the great church at Stratford.

W. M.

JAQUES.



“As he passed through the fields, and saw the animals around him,—‘Ye,’ said he, ‘are happy, and need not envy me that walk thus among you burthened with myself; nor do I, ye gentle beings, envy your felicity, for it is not the felicity of man. I have many distresses from which ye are free; I fear pain when I do not feel it; I sometimes shrink at evils recollected, and sometimes start at evils anticipated. Surely the equity of Providence has balanced peculiar sufferings with peculiar enjoyments.’

“With observations like these the prince amused himself as he returned, uttering them with a plaintive voice, yet with a look that discovered him to feel some complacence in his own perspicacity, and to receive some solace of the miseries of life from consciousness of the delicacy with which he felt, and the eloquence with which he bewailed them.”—RASSELAS, chap. ii.

THIS remark of Dr. Johnson on the consolation derived by his hero from the eloquence with which he gave vent to his complaints is perfectly just, but just only in such cases as those of Rasselas. The misery that can be expressed in flowing periods cannot be of more importance than that experienced by the Abyssinian prince enclosed in the Happy Valley. His greatest calamity was no more than that he could not leave a place in which all the luxuries of life were at his command. But, as old Chremes says in the *Heautontimorumenos*,

“Miserum? quem minus credere 'st?

Quid reliqui 'st, quin habeat, quæ quidem in homine dicuntur bona?
 Parentes, patriam incolumem, amicos, genu', cognatos, divitias:
 Atque hæc perinde sunt ut illius animus qui ea possidet;
 Qui uti scit, ei bona; illi, qui non utitur rectè, mala.”*

On which, as

“Plain truth, dear Bentley, needs no parts of speech,”

I cannot do better than transcribe the commentary of Hickie, or some other grave expositor from whose pages he has transferred it to his own. “'Tis certain that the real enjoyment arising from external advantages depends wholly upon the situation of the mind of him who possesses them; for if he chance to labour under any secret anguish, this destroys all relish; or,

* It may be thus attempted in something like the metre of the original, which the learned know by the sounding name of Tetrameter Iambic Acatalectic:

“Does Clinia talk of misery? Believe his idle tale who can?

What hinders it that he should have whate'er is counted good for
 man,—

His father's home, his native land, with wealth, and friends, and
 kith and kin?

But all these blessings will be prized according to the mind within:
 Well used, the owner finds them good; if badly used, he deems
 them ill.

Cl. Nay, but his sire was always stern, and even now I fear him
 still,” &c.

if he know not how to use them for valuable purposes, they are so far from being of any service to him, that they often turn to real misfortunes." It is of no consequence that this profound reflection is nothing to the purpose in the place where it appears, because Chremes is not talking of any secret anguish, but of the use or abuse made of advantages according to the disposition of the individual to whom they have been accorded; and the anguish of Clinia was by no means secret. He feared the perpetual displeasure of his father, and knew not whether absence might not have diminished or alienated the affections of the lady on whose account he had abandoned home and country; but the general proposition of the sentence cannot be denied. A "fatal remembrance"—to borrow a phrase from one of the most beautiful of Moore's melodies—may render a life, apparently abounding in prosperity, wretched and unhappy, as the vitiation of a single humour of the eye casts a sickly and unnatural hue over the gladsome meadow, or turns to a lurid light the brilliancy of the sunniest skies.

Rasselas and Jaques have no secret anguish to torment them, no real cares to disturb the even current of their tempers. To get rid of the prince first:—His sorrow is no more than that of the starling in the

Sentimental Journey. He cannot get out. He is discontented, because he has not the patience of Wordsworth's nuns, who fret not in their narrow cells ; or of Wordsworth's muse, which murmurs not at being cribbed and confined to a sonnet. He wants the philosophy of that most admirable of all jail-ditties,—and will not reflect that

“ Every island is a prison,
Close surrounded by the sea;
Kings and princes, for that reason,
Prisoners are as well as we.”

And as his calamity is, after all, very tolerable,—as many a sore heart or a wearied mind, buffeting about amid the billows and breakers of the external world, would feel but too happy to exchange conditions with him in his safe haven of rest,—it is no wonder that the weaving of sonorous sentences of easily soothed sorrow should be the extent of the mental afflictions of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia.

Who or what Jaques was before he makes his appearance in the forest, Shakspeare does not inform us,—any farther than that he had been a *roué* of considerable note, as the Duke tells him, when he proposes to

“Cleanse the foul body of the infected world,
If they will patiently receive my medicine.

Duke. Fie on thee ! I can tell what thou wouldst do.

Jaques. What, for a counter, would I do but good ?

Duke. Most mischievous foul sin, in chiding sin ;
For thou thyself hast been a libertine
As sensual as the brutish sting itself ;
And all the embossed sores and headed evils
That thou with licence of free foot hast caught,
Wouldst thou disgorge into the general world.”

This, and that he was one of the three or four loving lords who put themselves into voluntary exile with the old Duke, leaving their lands and revenues to enrich the new one, who therefore gave them good leave to wander, is all we know about him, until he is formally announced to us as the melancholy Jaques. The very announcement is a tolerable proof that he is not soul-stricken in any material degree. When Rosalind tells him that he is considered to be a melancholy fellow, he is hard put to it to describe in what his melancholy consists. “I have,” he says,

“Neither the scholar’s melancholy, which
Is emulation ; nor the musician’s, which is
Fantastical ; nor the courtier’s, which is proud ;
Nor the soldier’s,
Which is ambitious ; nor the lawyer’s, which
Is politic ; nor the lady’s, which is nice ;
Nor the lover’s, which is all these : but it is

A melancholy of mine own, compounded
Of many simples, extracted from many objects,
And indeed
The sundry contemplation of my travels,
In which my often rumination wraps me
In a most humorous sadness."*

He is nothing more than an idle gentleman given to musing, and making invectives against the affairs of the world, which are more remarkable for the poetry of their style and expression than the pungency of their satire. His famous description of the seven ages of man is that of a man who has seen but little to complain of in his career through life. The sorrows of his infant are of the slightest kind, and he notes that it is taken care of in a nurse's lap. The griefs of his schoolboy are confined to the necessity of going to school; and he, too, has had an anxious hand to attend to him. His shining morning face reflects the superintendence of one—probably a mother—interested in his

* This is printed as prose, but assuredly it is blank verse. The alteration of a syllable or two, which in the corrupt state of the text of these plays is the slightest of all possible critical licences, would make it run perfectly smooth. At all events, in the second line, "emulation" should be "emulative," to make it agree with the other clauses of the sentence. The courtier's melancholy is not *pride*, nor the soldier's *ambition*, &c. The adjective is used throughout,—*fantastical*, *proud*, *ambitious*, *politic*, *nice*.

welfare. The lover is tortured by no piercing pangs of love, his woes evaporating themselves musically in a ballad of his own composition, written not to his mistress, but fantastically addressed to her eyebrow. The soldier appears in all the pride and the swelling hopes of his spirit-stirring trade,

“Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon’s mouth.”

The fair round belly of the justice lined with good capon lets us know how he has passed his life. He is full of ease, magisterial authority, and squirely dignity. The lean and slippered pantaloon, and the dotard sunk into second childishness, have suffered only the common lot of humanity, without any of the calamities that embitter the unavoidable malady of old age.* All the characters in Jaques’s sketch are well taken care of. The infant is nursed; the boy educated; the youth tormented with no greater cares than the necessity of hunting after rhymes to please the ear of a lady, whose love sits so lightly upon him as to set him upon nothing more serious than such

* “Senectus ipsa est morbus.”—*Ter. Phorm.* iv. i. 9.

a self-amusing task; the man in prime of life is engaged in gallant deeds, brave in action, anxious for character, and ambitious of fame; the man in declining years has won the due honours of his rank, he enjoys the luxuries of the table and dispenses the terrors of the bench; the man of age still more advanced is well to do in the world. If his shank be shrunk, it is not without hose and slipper,—if his eyes be dim, they are spectacled,—if his years have made him lean, they have gathered for him wherewithal to fatten the pouch by his side. And when this strange eventful history is closed by the penalties paid by men who live too long, Jaques does not tell us that the helpless being,

“Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything,”
is left unprotected in his helplessness.

Such pictures of life do not proceed from a man very heavy at heart. Nor can it be without design that they are introduced into this especial place. The moment before, the famished Orlando has burst in upon the sylvan meal of the Duke, brandishing a naked sword, demanding with furious threat food for himself and his helpless companion,

“Oppressed with two weak evils, age and hunger.”

The Duke, struck with his earnest appeal, cannot refrain from comparing the real suffering which he witnesses in Orlando with that which is endured by himself and his "co-mates, and partners in exile." Addressing Jaques, he says,

"Thou seest we are not all alone unhappy.
This wide and universal theatre
Presents more woeful pageants than the scene
Wherein we play in."*

But the spectacle and the comment upon it lightly touch Jaques, and he starts off at once into a witty and poetic comparison of the real drama of the world with the mimic drama of the stage, in which, with the sight of well-nurtured youth driven to the savage desperation of periling his own life, and assailing that of others,—and of weakly old age lying down in the feeble but equally resolved desperation of dying by the wayside, driven to this extremity by sore fatigue and hunger,—he diverts himself and his audience, whether in the forest or theatre, on the stage or in the closet, with graphic descriptions of human life; not one of them, proceeding as they do from the lips of the *melancholy* Jaques, presenting a single point

* Query *on*? "Wherein we play *in*" is tautological. "Wherein we play *on*," *i. e.* "continue to play."

on which true melancholy can dwell. Mourning over what cannot be avoided must be in its essence commonplace: and nothing has been added to the lamentations over the ills brought by the flight of years since Moses, the man of God,* declared the concluding period of protracted life to be a period of labour and sorrow;—since Solomon, or whoever else writes under the name of the Preacher, in a passage which, whether it is inspired or not, is a passage of exquisite beauty, warned us to provide in youth, “while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; while the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain: in the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened, and the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low; also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way,

* Psalm xc. “A prayer of Moses, the man of God,” v. 10.

and the almond-tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burthen, and desire shall fail : because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets : or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern ;” -- or, to make a shorter quotation, since Homer summed up all these ills by applying to old age the epithet of *λυγρος*,—a word which cannot be translated, but the force of which must be felt. Abate these unavoidable misfortunes, and the catalogue of Jaques is that of happy conditions. In his visions there is no trace of the child doomed to wretchedness before its very birth ; no hint that such a thing could occur as its being made an object of calculation, one part medical, three parts financial, to the starveling surgeon, whether by the floating of the lungs, or other test equally fallacious and fee-producing, the miserable mother may be convicted of doing that which, before she had attempted, all that is her soul of woman must have been torn from its uttermost roots, when in an agony of shame and dread the child that was to have made her forget her labour was committed to the cesspool. No hint that the days of infancy should be devoted to the damnation

of a factory, or to the tender mercies of a parish beadle. No hint that philosophy should come forward armed with the panoply offensive and defensive of logic and eloquence, to prove that the inversion of all natural relations was just and wise,—that the toil of childhood was due to the support of manhood,—that those hours, the very labours of which even the etymologists give to recreation, should be devoted to those wretched drudgeries which seem to split the hearts of all but those who derive from them blood-stained money, or blood-bedabbled applause. Jaques sees not Greensmith squeezing his children by the throat until they die. He hears not the supplication of the hapless boy begging his still more hapless father for a moment's respite, ere the fatal handkerchief is twisted round his throat by the hand of him to whom he owed his being. Jaques thinks not of the baby deserted on the step of the inhospitable door, of the shame of the mother, of the disgrace of the parents, of the misery of the forsaken infant. His boy is at school, his soldier in the breach, his elder on the justice-seat. Are these the woes of life? Is there no neglected creature left to himself or to the worse nurture of others, whose trade it is to corrupt,—who will teach him what was taught to

swaggering Jack Chance, found on Newgate steps, and educated at the venerable seminary of St. Giles's Pound, where

“They taught him to drink, and to thieve, and fight,
And everything else but to read and write.”

Is there no stripling short of commons, but abundant in the supply of the strap or the cudgel?—no man fighting through the world in fortuneless struggles, and occupied by cares or oppressed by wants more stringent than those of love?—or in love itself does the current of that bitter passion never run less smooth than when sonnets to a lady's eyebrow are the prime objects of solicitude?—or may not even he who began with such sonneteering have found something more serious and sad, something more heart-throbbing and soul-rending, in the progress of his passion? Is the soldier melancholy in the storm and whirlwind of war? Is the gallant confronting of the cannon a matter to be complained of? The dolorous flight, the trampled battalion, the broken squadron, the lost battle, the lingering wound, the ill-furnished hospital, the unfed blockade, hunger and thirst, and pain, and fatigue, and mutilation, and cold, and rout, and scorn, and slight,—services neglected, unworthy claims preferred, life wasted, or honour tarnished,—are all passed

by! In peaceful life we have no deeper misfortune placed before us than that it is not unusual that a justice of peace may be prosy in remark and trite in illustration. Are there no other evils to assail us through the agony of life? And when the conclusion comes, how far less tragic is the portraiture of mental imbecility, if considered as a state of misery than as one of comparative happiness, as escaping a still worse lot! Crabbe is sadder far than Jaques, when, after his appalling description of the inmates of a workhouse,—(what would Crabbe have written *now*?)—he winds up by showing to us amid its victims two persons as being

“*happier* far than they,
The moping idiot, and the madman gay.”

If what he here sums up as the result of his life's observations on mankind be all that calls forth the melancholy of the witty and eloquent speaker, he had not much to complain of. Mr. Shandy lamenting in sweetly modulated periods, because his son has been christened Tristram instead of Trismegistus, is as much an object of condolence. Jaques has just seen the aspect of famine, and heard the words of despair; the Duke has pointed out to him the consideration that more woful and practical calamities exist than

even the exile of princes and the downfall of lords; and he breaks off into a light strain of satire, fit only for jesting comedy. Trim might have rebuked him as he rebuked the prostrate Mr. Shandy, by reminding him that there are other things to make us melancholy in the world: and nobody knew it better, or could say it better, than he in whose brain was minted the hysteric passion of Lear choked by his button,—the farewell of victorious Othello to all the pomp, pride, and circumstance of glorious war,—the tears of Richard over the submission of roan Barbary to Bolingbroke,—the demand of Romeo that the Mantuan druggist should supply him with such soon-speeding gear that will rid him of hated life

“As violently as hasty powder fired

Doth hurry from the fatal cannon's womb,”—

the desolation of Antony,—the mourning of Henry over sire slain by son, and son by sire,—or the despair of Macbeth. I say nothing of the griefs of Constance, or Isabel, or Desdemona, or Juliet, or Ophelia, because in the sketches of Jaques he passes by all allusion to women: a fact which of itself is sufficient to prove that his melancholy was but in play,—was nothing more than what Arthur remembered when he was in France, where

“Young gentlemen would be as sad as night,
Only for wantonness.”

Shakspeare well knew that there is no true pathetic, nothing that can permanently lacerate the heart, and embitter the speech, unless a woman be concerned. It is the legacy left us by Eve. The tenor of man's woe, says Milton, with a most ungallant and grisly pun, is still from *wo*-man to begin; and he who will give himself a few moments to reflect will find that the stern trigamist is right. On this, however, I shall not dilate. I may perhaps have something to say as we go on, of the ladies of Shakspeare. For the present purpose, it is enough to remark with Trim, that there are many real griefs to make a man lie down and cry, without troubling ourselves with those which are put forward by the poetic mourner in the forest of Arden.

Different indeed is the sight set before the eyes of Adam in the great poem just referred to, when he is told to look upon the miseries which the fall of man has entailed upon his descendants. Far other than the scenes that flit across this melancholy man by profession are those evoked by Michael in the visionary lazar-house. It would be ill-befitting, indeed, that the merry note of the sweet bird warbling freely in

the glade should be marred by discordant sounds of woe, cataloguing the dreary list of disease,

“ All maladies

Of ghastly spasm, or racking torture, qualms
Of heartsick agony, all feverous kinds,
Convulsions, epilepsies, fierce catarrhs,
Intestine stone and ulcer, colic pangs,
Demoniac frenzy, moping melancholy,
Marasmus, and wide-wasting pestilence,
Dropsies, and asthmas, and joint-racking rheums ;”

while, amid the dire tossing and deep groans of the sufferers,

“ ——— Despair

Tended the sick, busiest from couch to couch :
And over them triumphant Death his dart
Shook, but delayed to strike.”

And equally ill-befitting would be any serious allusion to those passions and feelings which in their violence or their anguish render the human bosom a lazar-house filled with maladies of the mind as racking and as wasting as those of the body, and call forth a supplication for the releasing blow of Death as the final hope, with an earnestness as desperate, and cry as loud as ever arose from the tenement, sad, noisome, and dark, which holds the joint-racked victims of physical disease. Such themes should not sadden the festive

banquet in the forest. The Duke and his co-mates and partners in exile, reconciled to their present mode of life, ["I would not change it," says Amiens, speaking, we may suppose, the sentiments of all,] and successful in having plucked the precious jewel, content, from the head of ugly and venomous Adversity, are ready to bestow their woodland fare upon real suffering, but in no mood to listen to the heart-rending descriptions of sorrows graver than those which form a theme for the discourses which Jaques in mimic melancholy contributes to their amusement.

Shakspeare designed him to be a maker of fine sentences, — a dresser forth in sweet language of the ordinary common-places or the common-place mishaps of mankind, and he takes care to show us that he did not intend him for anything beside. With what admirable art he is confronted with Touchstone. He enters merrily laughing at the pointless philosophising of the fool in the forest. His lungs crow like chanticleer when he hears him moralizing over his dial, and making the deep discovery that ten o'clock has succeeded nine, and will be followed by eleven. When Touchstone himself appears, we do not find in his own discourse any touches of such deep contemplation. He is shrewd, sharp, worldly, witty, keen, gibing, observant. It is

plain that he has been mocking Jaques; and, as is usual, the mocked thinks himself the mocker. If one has moralized the spectacle of a wounded deer into a thousand similes, comparing his weeping into the stream to the conduct of worldlings in giving in their testaments the sum of more to that which had too much,—his abandonment, to the parting of the flux of companions from misery,—the sweeping by of the careless herd full of the pasture, to the desertion of the poor and broken bankrupt by the fat and greasy citizens,—and so forth; if such have been the common-places of Jaques, are they not fitly matched by the common-places of Touchstone upon his watch? It is as high a stretch of fancy that brings the reflection how

“ — from hour to hour we ripe and ripe,
And then from hour to hour we rot and rot,
And thereby hangs a tale,”

which is scoffed at by Jaques, as that which dictates his own moralizings on the death of the deer. The motley fool is as wise as the melancholy lord whom he is parodying. The shepherd Corin, who replies to the courtly quizzing of Touchstone by such apophthegms as that “it is the property of rain to wet, and of fire to burn,” is unconsciously performing the same part to the clown, as *he* had been designedly

performing to Jaques. Witty nonsense is answered by dull nonsense, as the emptiness of poetry had been answered by the emptiness of prose. There was nothing sincere in the lamentation over the wounded stag. It was only used as a peg on which to hang fine conceits. Had Falstaff seen the deer, his imagination would have called up visions of haunches and pasties, preluding an everlasting series of cups of sack among the revel riot of boon companions, and he would have instantly ordered its throat to be cut. If it had fallen in the way of Friar Lawrence, the mild-hearted man of herbs would have endeavoured to extract the arrow, heal the wound, and let the hart ungalled go free. Neither would have thought the hairy fool a subject for reflections, which neither relieved the wants of man nor the pains of beast. Jaques complains of the injustice and cruelty of killing deer, but unscrupulously sits down to dine upon venison, and sorrows over the sufferings of the native burghers of the forest city, without doing anything farther than amusing himself with rhetorical flourishes drawn from the contemplation of the pain which he witnesses with professional coolness and unconcern.

It is evident, in short, that the happiest days of his life are those which he is spending in the forest. His

raking days are over, and he is tired of city dissipation. He has shaken hands with the world, finding, with Cowley, that "he and it would never agree." To use an expression somewhat vulgar, he has had his fun for his money; and he thinks the bargain so fair and conclusive on both sides, that he has no notion of opening another. His mind is relieved of a thousand anxieties which beset him in the court, and he breathes freely in the forest. The iron has not entered into his soul; nothing has occurred to chase sleep from his eyelids; and his fantastic reflections are, as he himself takes care to tell us, but general observations on the ordinary and outward manners and feelings of mankind,—a species of taxing which

" — like a wild-goose flies,
Unclaim'd of any man."

Above all, in having abandoned station, and wealth, and country, to join the faithful few who have in evil report clung manfully to their prince, he knows that he has played a noble and an honourable part; and they to whose lot it may have fallen to experience the happiness of having done a generous, disinterested, or self-denying action,—or sacrificed temporary interests to undying principle,—or shown to the world without,

that what are thought to be its great advantages can be flung aside, or laid aside, when they come in collision with the feelings and passions of the world within,—will be perfectly sure that Jaques, reft of land, and banished from court, felt himself exalted in his own eyes, and therefore easy of mind, whether he was mourning in melodious blank verse, or weaving jocular parodies on the canzonets of the good-humoured Amiens.

He was happy “under the greenwood tree.” Addison I believe it is who says, that all mankind have an instinctive love of country and woodland scenery, and he traces it to a sort of dim recollection imprinted upon us of our original haunt, the garden of Eden. It is at all events certain, that, from the days when the cedars of Lebanon supplied images to the great poets of Jerusalem, to that in which the tall tree haunted Wordsworth “as a passion,” the forest has caught a strong hold of the poetic mind. It is with reluctance that I refrain from quoting; but the passages of surpassing beauty which crowd upon me from all times and languages are too numerous. I know not which to exclude, and I have not room for all; let me then take a bit of prose from one who never indulged in poetry, and I think I shall make it a case in point.

In a little book called *Statistical Sketches of Upper Canada, for the use of Emigrants, by a Backwoodsman*, now lying before me, the author, after describing the field-sports in Canada with a precision and a *goût* to be derived only from practice and zeal, concludes a chapter, most appropriately introduced by a motto from *The Lady of the Lake*,

“ 'Tis merry, 'tis merry in good greenwood,
When the mavis and merle are singing,
When the deer sweep by, and the hounds are in cry,
And the hunter's horn is ringing,”

by saying,

“It is only since writing the above that I fell in with the first volume of *Moore's Life of Lord Edward Fitzgerald*; and I cannot describe the pleasure I received from reading his vivid, spirited, and accurate description of the feelings he experienced on first taking on him the life of a hunter. At an earlier period of life than Lord Edward had then attained, I made my debut in the forest, and first assumed the blanket-cloak and the rifle, the moccasin and the snow-shoe; and the ecstatic feeling of Arab-like independence, and the utter contempt for the advantage and restrictions of civilization, which he describes, I then felt in its fullest power. And even now, when my way

of life, like Macbeth's, is falling 'into the sere, the yellow leaf,' and when a tropical climate, privation, disease, and thankless toil are combining with advancing years to unstring a frame the strength of which once set hunger, cold, and fatigue at defiance, and to undermine a constitution that once appeared iron-bound, still I cannot lie down by a fire in the woods without the elevating feeling which I experienced formerly returning, though in a diminished degree. This must be human nature;—for it is an undoubted fact, that no man who associates with and follows the pursuits of the Indian, for any length of time, ever voluntarily returns to civilized society.

“What a companion in the woods Lord Edward must have been! and how shocking to think that, with talents which would have made him at once the idol and the ornament of his profession, and affections which must have rendered him an object of adoration in all the relations of private life—with honour, with courage, with generosity, with every trait that can at once ennoble and endear,—he should never have been taught that there is a higher principle of action than the mere impulse of the passions,—that he should never have learned, before plunging his country into blood and disorder, to have weighed

the means he possessed with the end he proposed, or the problematical good with the certain evil!—that he should have had Tom Paine for a tutor in religion and politics, and Tom Moore for a biographer, to hold up as a pattern, instead of warning, the errors and misfortunes of a being so noble,—to subserve the revolutionary purposes of a faction, who, like Samson, are pulling down a fabric which will bury both them and their enemies under it.”

Never mind the aberrations of Lord Edward Fitzgerald, the religion or the politics of Tom Paine, or the biography of Tom Moore. On all these matters I may hold my own opinions, but they are not wanted now; but have we not here the feelings of Jaques? Here are the gloomy expressions of general sorrow over climate, privation, disease, thankless toil, advancing years, unstrung frame. But here also we have ecstatic emotions of Arab-like independence, generous reflections upon political adversaries, and high-minded adherence to the views and principles which in his honour and conscience he believed to be in all circumstances inflexibly right, coming from the heart of a forest. The Backwoodsman is Dunlop; and is he, in spite of this sad-sounding passage, melancholy? Not he, in good sooth. The very next page to that which I have

quoted is a description of the pleasant mode of travelling in Canada, before the march of improvement had made it comfortable and convenient.*

Jaques was just as woe-begone as the Tyger, and no more. I remember when he—Dunlop I mean, not Jaques—used to laugh at the phrenologists of Edin-

* “Formerly, that is to say, previous to the peace of 1815, a journey between Quebec and Sandwich was an undertaking considerably more tedious and troublesome than the voyage from London to Quebec. In the first place, the commissariat of the expedition had to be cared for; and to that end every gentleman who was liable to travel had, as a part of his appointments, a provision basket, which held generally a cold round of beef, tin plates and drinking cups, tea, sugar, biscuits, and about a gallon of brandy. These, with your wardrobe and a camp-bed, were stowed away in a batteau, or flat-bottomed boat; and off you set with a crew of seven stout, light-hearted, jolly, lively Canadians, who sung their boat songs all the time they could spare from smoking their pipes. You were accompanied by a fleet of similar boats, called a brigade, the crews of which assisted each other up the rapids, and at night put into some creek, bay, or uninhabited island, where fires were lighted, tents made of the sails, and the song, the laugh, and the shout were heard, with little intermission, all the night through; and if you had the felicity to have among the party a fifer or a fiddler, the dance was sometimes kept up all night,—for, if a Frenchman has a fiddle, sleep ceases to be a necessary of life with him. This mode of travelling was far from being unpleasant, for there was something of romance and adventure in it; and the scenes you witnessed, both by night and day, were picturesque in the highest degree. But it was tedious: for you were in great luck if you arrived at your journey’s end in a month; and if the

burgh for saying, after a careful admeasurement, that his skull in all points was exactly that of Shakspeare,—I suppose he will be equally inclined to laugh when he finds who is the double an old companion has selected for him. But no matter. His melancholy passes away not more rapidly than that of Jaques; and I venture to say that the latter, if he were existing in flesh and blood, would have no scruple in joining the doctor this moment over the bowl of punch which I am sure he is brewing, has brewed, or is about to brew, on the banks of Huron or Ontario.

Whether he would or not, he departs from the stage with the grace and easy elegance of a gentleman in heart and manners. He joins his old antagonist the usurping Duke in his fallen fortunes; he had spurned him in his prosperity: his restored friend he bequeaths to his former honour, deserved by his pa-

weather were boisterous, or the wind a-head, you might be an indefinite time longer.

“But your march of improvement is a sore destroyer of the romantic and picturesque. A gentleman about to take such a journey now-a-days, orders his servant to pack his portmanteau, and put it on board the *John Molson*, or any of his family; and at the stated hour he marches on board, the bell rings, the engine is put in motion, and away you go smoking, and splashing, and walloping along, at the rate of ten knots an hour, in the ugliest species of craft that ever disfigured a marine landscape.”

tience and his virtue,—he compliments Oliver on his restoration to his land, and love, and great allies,—wishes Silvius joy of his long-sought and well-earned marriage,—cracks upon Touchstone one of those good-humoured jests to which men of the world on the eve of marriage must laughingly submit,—and makes his bow. Some sage critics have discovered as a great geographical fault in Shakspeare, that he introduces the tropical lion and serpent into Arden, which, it appears, they have ascertained to lie in some temperate zone. I wish them joy of their sagacity. Monsters more wonderful are to be found in that forest; for never yet, since water ran and tall tree bloomed, were there gathered together such a company as those who compose the *dramatis personæ* of *As You Like it*. All the prodigies spawned by Africa, “*leonum arida nutrix*,” might well have teemed in a forest, wherever situate, that was inhabited by such creatures as Rosalind, Touchstone, and Jaques.

*_*_* As to the question which opened these Papers,—why, I must leave it to the jury. Is the jesting, revelling, rioting Falstaff, broken of fortunes, luckless in life, sunk in habits, buffeting with the discreditable part of the world, or the melancholy, mourning, com-

plaining Jaques, honourable of conduct, high in moral position, fearless of the future, and lying in the forest away from trouble,—which of them, I say, feels more the load of care? I think Shakspeare well knew, and depicted them accordingly. But I must leave it to my readers, *si qui sunt*. W. M.

ROMEO.

“Of this unlucky sort our Romeus is one,
For all his hap turns to mishap, and all his mirth to mone.”
The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet.

“NEVER,” says Prince Escalus, in the concluding distich of *Romeo and Juliet*,

“— was there story of more woe
Than this of Juliet and her Romeo.”

It is a story which, in the inartificial shape of a black-letter ballad, powerfully affected the imagination, and awakened the sensibilities of our ancestors, and in the hands of Shakspeare has become *the* love-story of the whole world. Who cares for the loves of Petrarch and Laura, or of Eloisa and Abelard, compared with those of Romeo and Juliet? The gallantries of Petrarch are conveyed in models of polished and ornate verse; but,

in spite of their elegance, we feel that they are frosty as the Alps beneath which they were written. They are only the exercises of genius, not the ebullitions of feeling; and we can easily credit the story that Petrarch refused a dispensation to marry Laura, lest marriage might spoil his poetry. The muse, and not the lady, was his mistress. In the case of Abelard there are many associations which are not agreeable; and, after all, we can hardly help looking upon him as a fitter hero for *Bayle's Dictionary* than a romance. In *Romeo and Juliet* we have the poetry of Petrarch without its iciness, and the passion of Eloisa free from its coarse exhibition. We have, too, philosophy far more profound than ever was scattered over the syllogistic pages of Abelard, full of knowledge and acuteness as they undoubtedly are.

But I am not about to consider Romeo merely as a lover, or to use him as an illustration of Lysander's often-quoted line,

“The course of true love never did run smooth.”

In that course the current has been as rough to others as to Romeo; who, in spite of all his misfortunes, has wooed and won the lady of his affections. That Lysander's line is often true, cannot be questioned; though

it is no more than the exaggeration of an annoyed suitor to say that love has *never* run smoothly. The reason why it should be so generally true, is given in *Peveril of the Peak*, by Sir Walter Scott ; a man who closely approached to the genius of Shakspeare in depicting character, and who, above all writers of imagination, most nearly resembled him in the possession of keen, shrewd, every-day common sense, rendered more remarkable by the contrast of the romantic, pathetic, and picturesque by which it is in all directions surrounded.

“ This celebrated passage

[‘ Ah me ! for aught that ever I could read,’ &c.]

which we have prefixed to this chapter, [chap. xii. vol. i. *Peveril of the Peak*,] has, like most observations of the same author, its foundation in real experience. The period at which love is felt most strongly is seldom that at which there is much prospect of its being brought to a happy issue. In fine, there are few men who do not look back in secret to some period of their youth at which a sincere and early affection was repulsed or betrayed, or became abortive under opposing circumstances. It is these little passages of secret history, which leave a tinge of romance in every bosom,

scarce permitting us, even in the most busy or the most advanced period of life, to listen with total indifference to a tale of true love.”*

These remarks, the justice of which cannot be questioned, scarcely apply to the case of Romeo. In no respect save that the families were at variance, was the match between him and Juliet such as not to afford a prospect of happy issue; and everything indicated the possibility of making their marriage a ground of reconciliation between their respective houses. Both are tired of the quarrel. Lady Capulet and Lady Montague are introduced in the very first scene of the play, endeavouring to pacify their husbands; and when the brawl is over, Paris laments to Juliet's father that it is a pity persons of such honourable reckoning should have lived so long at variance. For Romeo himself old Capulet expresses the highest respect, as being one of the ornaments of the city; and, after the death of Juliet, old Montague, touched by her truth and constancy, proposes to raise to her a statue of gold. With such sentiments and predispositions, the early passion

* Was Sir Walter thinking of his own case when he wrote this passage? See his *Life* by Lockhart, vol. i. p. 242. His family used to call Sir Walter *Old Peveril*, from some fancied resemblance of the character.

of the Veronese lovers does not come within the canon of Sir Walter Scott; and, as I have said, I do not think that Romeo is designed merely as an exhibition of a man unfortunate in love.

I consider him to be meant as the character of an *unlucky* man,—a man who, with the best views and fairest intentions, is perpetually so unfortunate as to fail in every aspiration, and, while exerting himself to the utmost in their behalf, to involve all whom he holds dearest in misery and ruin. At the commencement of the play an idle quarrel among some low retainers of the rival families produces a general riot, with which he has nothing to do. He is not present from beginning to end; the tumult has been so sudden and unexpected, that his father is obliged to ask

“What set this ancient quarrel new abroad?”

And yet it is this very quarrel which lays him prostrate in death by his own hand, outside Capulet's monument, before the tragedy concludes. While the fray was going on, he was nursing love-fancies, and endeavouring to persuade himself that his heart was breaking for Rosaline. How afflicting his passion must have been, we see by the conundrums he makes upon it:

“ Love is a smoke raised with the fume of sighs ;
Being purged, a fire sparkling in lovers' eyes ;
Being vex'd, a sea nourish'd with lovers' tears.*
What is it else ?—a madness most discreet,
A choking gall, and a preserving sweet.” —

And so forth. The sorrows which we can balance in such trim antitheses do not lie very deep. The time is rapidly advancing when his sentences will be less sounding.

“ It is my lady ; oh, it is my love !
O that she knew she were ! ”

speaks more touchingly the state of his engrossed soul than all the fine metaphors ever vented. The supercilious Spartans in the days of their success prided themselves upon the laconic brevity of their despatches to states in hostility or alliance with them. When they were sinking before the Macedonians, another style was adopted ; and Philip observed that he had taught them to lengthen their monosyllables. Real love has had a contrary effect upon Romeo. It has abridged his swelling passages, and brought him to the language of prose. The reason of the alteration is the same in both cases. The brevity of the Spartans was the result of studied affectation. They sought, by the insolence of

* Is there not a line missing ?

threats obscurely insinuated in a sort of demi-oracular language, to impose upon others,—perhaps they imposed upon themselves,—an extravagant opinion of their mysterious power. The secret was found out at last, and their anger bubbled over in big words and lengthened sentences. The love of Rosaline is as much affected on the part of Romeo, and it explodes in wire-drawn conceits.

“ When the devout religion of mine eye
Maintains such falsehood, then turn tears to fires ;
And those who often drown'd could never die,
Transparent heretics, be burnt for liars.
One fairer than my love !—the all-seeing sun
Ne'er saw her match since first the world begun.”

It is no wonder that a gentleman who is so clever as to be able to say such extremely fine things, forgets, in the next scene, the devout religion of his eye, without any apprehension of the transparent heretic being burnt for a liar by the transmutation of tears into the flames of an *auto da fe*. He is doomed to discover that love in his case is not a madness most discreet when he defies the stars ; there are then no lines of magnificent declamation.

“ Is it even so ? then I defy you, stars !
Thou knowest my lodging : get me ink and paper,
And hire post-horses ; I will hence to-night.”

Nothing can be plainer prose than these verses. But how were they delivered? Balthazar will tell us.

“ Pardon me, sir; I dare not leave you thus :
Your looks are pale and wild, and do import
Some misadventure.”

Again, nothing can be more quiet than his final determination :

“ Well, Juliet, I will lie with thee to-night.”

It is plain Juliet,—unattended by any romantic epithet of love. There is nothing about “Cupid’s arrow,” or “Dian’s wit;” no honeyed word escapes his lips,—nor again does any accent of despair. His mind is so made up,—the whole course of the short remainder of his life so unalterably fixed, that it is perfectly useless to think more about it. He has full leisure to reflect without disturbance upon the details of the squalid penury which made him set down the poor apothecary as a fit instrument for what now had become his “need;” and he offers his proposition of purchasing that soon-speeding gear which is to hurry him out of life, with the same business-like tone as if he were purchasing a pennyworth of sugar-candy. When the apothecary suggests the danger of selling such drugs, Romeo can reflect on the folly of scrupling to sacrifice

life when the holder of it is so poor and unfortunate. Gallant and gay of appearance himself, he tells his new-found acquaintance that bareness, famine, oppression, ragged misery, the hollow cheek and the hungry eye, are fitting reasons why death should be desired, not avoided; and with a cool philosophy assures him that gold is worse poison than the compound which hurries the life-weary taker out of the world. The language of desperation cannot be more dismally determined. What did the apothecary think of his customer as he pocketed the forty ducats? There you go, lad,—there you go, he might have said,—there you go with that in your girdle that, if you had the strength of twenty men, would straight despatch you. Well do I know the use for which you intend it. To-morrow's sun sees not you alive. And you philosophise to me on the necessity of buying food and getting into flesh. You taunt my poverty,—you laugh at my rags,—you bid me defy the law,—you tell me the world is my enemy. It may be so, lad,—it may be so; but less tattered is my garment than your heart,—less harassed by law of one kind or another my pursuit than yours. What ails that lad? I know not, neither do I care. But that he should moralize to me on the hard lot which I experience,—that he, with those looks and those accents, should

fancy that I, amid my beggarly account of empty boxes, am less happy than he,—ha! ha! ha!—it is something to make one laugh. Ride your way, boy: I have your forty ducats in my purse, and you my drug in your pocket. And the law! Well! What can the executioner do worse to me in my penury and my age than you have doomed for yourself in your youth and splendour. I carry not my hangman in my saddle as I ride along. And the curses which the rabble may pour upon my dying moments,—what are they to the howling gurgle which, now rising from your heart, is deafening your ears? Adieu, boy,—adieu!—and keep your philosophy for yourself. Ho! ho! ho!

But had any other passion or pursuit occupied Romeo, he would have been equally unlucky as in his love. Ill fortune has marked him for her own. From beginning to end he intends the best; but his interfering is ever for the worst. It is evident that he has not taken any part in the family feud which divides Verona, and his first attachment is to a lady of the antagonist house.* To see that lady,—perhaps

* Rosaline was niece of Capulet. The list of persons invited to the ball is

“ Signior Martino, and his wife and daughters;
County Anselm[o], and his beauteous sisters;

to mark that he has had no share in the tumult of the morning,—he goes to a ball given by Capulet, at which the suitor accepted by the family is to be introduced to Juliet as her intended husband. Paris is in every way an eligible match.

“Verona’s summer hath not such a flower.”

He who has slain him addresses his corse as that of the “noble County Paris,” with a kindly remembrance that he was kinsman of a friend slain in Romeo’s own cause. Nothing can be more fervent, more honourable, or more delicate than his devoted and considerate wooing. His grief at the loss of Juliet is expressed in few words; but its sincerity is told by his midnight and secret visit to the tomb of her whom living he had honoured, and on whom, when dead, he could not restrain himself from lavish-

The lady widow of Vetruvio;
Signior Placentio, and his lovely nieces;
Mercutio, and his brother Valentine;
Mine uncle Capulet, his wife and daughters;
My fair niece Rosaline; [and] Livia;
Signior Valentio, and his cousin Tybalt;
Lucio, and the lively Helena.”

I have altered *Anselme* to the Italian form *Anselmo*, and in the seventh line inserted *and*. I think I may fairly claim this list as being in verse. It is always printed as prose.

ing funereal homage. Secure of the favour of her father, no serious objection could be anticipated from herself. When questioned by her mother, she readily promises obedience to parental wishes, and goes to the ball determined to "look to like, if looking liking move." Everything glides on in smooth current till the appearance of him whose presence is deadly. Romeo himself is a most reluctant visitor. He apprehends that the consequences of the night's revels will be the vile forfeit of a despised life by an untimely death, but submits to his destiny. He foresees that it is no wit to go, but consoles himself with the reflection that he "means well in going to this mask." His intentions, as usual, are good; and, as usual, their consequences are ruinous.

He yields to his passion, and marries Juliet. For this hasty act he has the excuse that the match may put an end to the discord between the families. Friar Lawrence hopes that

"this alliance may so happy prove
To turn your households' rancour into love."

It certainly has that effect in the end of the play, but it is by the suicidal deaths of the flower and hope of both families. Capulet and Montague tender,

in a gloomy peace, the hands of friendship, over the untimely grave of the poor sacrifices to their enmity. Had he met her elsewhere than in her father's house, he might have succeeded in a more prosperous love. But there his visit is looked upon by the professed duellist Tybalt, hot from the encounter of the morning, and enraged that he was baulked of a victim, as an intrusion and an insult. The fiery partisan is curbed with much difficulty by his uncle; and withdraws, his flesh trembling with wilful choler, determined to wreak vengeance at the first opportunity on the intruder. It is not long before the opportunity offers. Vainly does Romeo endeavour to pacify the bullying swordsman,—vainly does he protest that he loves the name of Capulet,—vainly does he decline the proffered duel. His good intentions are again doomed to be frustrated. There stands by his side as mad-blooded a spirit as Tybalt himself, and Mercutio, all unconscious of the reasons why Romeo refuses to fight, takes up the abandoned quarrel. The star of the unlucky man is ever in the ascendant. His ill-omened interference slays his friend. Had he kept quiet, the issue might have been different; but the power that had the steerage of his course had destined that the uplifting of his sword was to be

the signal of death to his very friend. And when the dying Mercutio says, "Why the devil came you between us? I was hurt under your arm;" he can only offer the excuse, which is always true, and always unavailing, "I thought all for the best." All his visions of reconciliation between the houses are dissipated. How can he now avoid fighting with Tybalt? His best friend lies dead, slain in his own quarrel, through his own accursed intermeddling; and the swaggering victor, still hot from the slaughter, comes back to triumph over the dead. Who with the heart and spirit of a man could under such circumstances refrain from exclaiming,

"Away to heaven, respective lenity!

And fire-eyed fury be my conduct now."

Vanish gentle breath, calm words, knees humbly bowed!—his weapon in an instant glitters in the blazing sun; and as with a lightning flash,—as rapidly and resistlessly,—before Benvolio can pull his sword from the scabbard, Tybalt, whom his kindred deemed a match for twenty men, is laid by the side of him who but a moment before had been the victim of his blade. What avails the practised science of the duellist, the gentleman of the very first house, of the first and second

cause!—how weak is the immortal passado, or the punto reverso, the hay, or all the other learned devices of Vincent Saviola, against the whirlwind rage of a man driven to desperation by all that can rouse fury or stimulate hatred! He sees the blood of his friend red upon the ground; the accents of gross and unprovoked outrage ring in his ears; the perverse and obstinate insolence of a bravo confident in his skill, and depending upon it to insure him impunity, has marred his hopes; and the butcher of the silk button has no chance against the demon which he has evoked. “A la stoccata” carries it not away in this encounter: but Romeo exults not in his death. He stands amazed, and is with difficulty hurried off, exclaiming against the constant fate which perpetually throws him in the way of misfortune. Well, indeed, may Friar Lawrence address him by the title of thou “fearful man!”—as a man whose career through life is calculated to inspire terror. Well may he say to him that

“Affliction is enamour’d of thy parts,
And thou art wedded to calamity.”

And slight is the attention which Romeo pays to the eloquent arguments by which it is proved that he had

every reason to consider himself happy. When the friar assures him that

“A pack of blessings lights upon thy back,
Happiness courts thee in her best array,”

the nurse may think it a discourse of learning and good counsel, fit to detain an enraptured auditor all the night. Romeo feels it in his case to be an idle declamation, unworthy of an answer.

The events which occur during his enforced absence, the haste of Paris to be wedded, the zeal of old Capulet in promoting the wishes of his expected son-in-law, the desperate expedient of the sleeping-draught,* the ac-

* Is there not some mistake in the length of time that this sleeping-draught is to occupy, if we consider the text as it now stands to be correct? Friar Lawrence says to Juliet, when he is recommending the expedient,

“Take thou this phial, being then in bed,
And this distilled liquor drink thou off:
When presently through all thy veins shall run
A cold and drowsy humour, which shall seize
Each vital spirit, &c.
And in this borrow'd likeness of shrunk death
Thou shalt remain *full two and forty hours*,
And then awake as from a pleasant sleep.”

Juliet retires to bed on Tuesday night, at a somewhat early hour. Her mother says after she departs, “’Tis now near night.” Say it is eleven o’clock: forty-two hours from that hour bring us to five

cident which prevented the delivery of the friar's letter, the officious haste of Balthazar to communicate

o'clock in the evening of Thursday; and yet we find the time of her awakening fixed in profound darkness, and not long before the dawn. We should allow at least ten hours more, and read,

“Thou shalt remain full *two and fifty* hours,”—

which would fix her awakening at three o'clock in the morning, a time which has been marked in a former scene as the approach of day.

“*Cap.* Come, stir, stir, stir! The second cock has crow'd,—
The curfew bell hath rung,—'tis three o'clock.”

Immediately after he says, “Good faith, 'tis day.” This observation may appear superfluously minute; but those who take the pains of reading the play critically will find that it is dated throughout with a most exact attention to hours. We can time almost every event. *Ex. gr.* Juliet dismisses the nurse on her errand to Romeo when the clock struck nine, and complains that she has not returned at twelve. At twelve she does return, and Juliet immediately proceeds to Friar Lawrence's cell, where she is married without delay. Romeo parts with his bride at once, and meets his friends while “the day is hot.” Juliet at the same hour addresses her prayer to the fiery-footed steeds of Phœbus, too slowly for her feelings progressing towards the west. The same exactness is observed in every part of the play.

I may remark, as another instance of Romeo's ill luck, the change of the original wedding day. When pressed by Paris, old Capulet says that “Wednesday is too soon,—on Thursday let it be;” but afterwards, when he imagines that his daughter is inclined to consult his wishes, he fixes it for Wednesday, even though his wife observes that Thursday is time enough. Had this day not been lost, the letter of Friar Lawrence might still have been forwarded to Mantua to explain what had occurred.

the tidings of Juliet's burial, are all matters out of his control. But the mode of his death is chosen by himself; and in that he is as unlucky as in everything else. Utterly loathing life, the manner of his leaving it must be instantaneous. He stipulates that the poison by which he is to die shall not be slow of effect. He calls for

“such soon-speeding gear
As will disperse itself through all the veins,
That the life-weary taker may fall dead.”

He leaves himself no chance of escape. Instant death is in his hand; and thanking the true apothecary for the quickness of his drugs, he scarcely leaves himself a moment with a kiss to die. If he had been less in a hurry,—if he had not felt it impossible to delay posting off to Verona for a single night,—if his riding had been less rapid, or his medicine less sudden in its effect, he might have lived. The friar was at hand to release Juliet from her tomb the very instant after the fatal phial had been emptied. That instant was enough: the unlucky man had effected his purpose just when there was still a chance that things might be amended. Those who wrote the scene between Romeo and Juliet which is intended to be pathetic, after her awakening and before his death, quite mistake the

character of the hero of the play. I do not blame them for their poetry, which is as good as that of second-rate writers of tragedy in general; and think them, on the whole, deserving of our commendation for giving us an additional proof how unable clever men upon town are to follow the conceptions of genius. Shakspeare, if he thought it consistent with the character which he had with so much deliberation framed, could have written a parting scene at least as good as that with which his tragedy has been supplied; but he saw the inconsistency, though his unasked assistants did not. They tell us they did it to consult popular taste. I do not believe them. I am sure that popular taste would approve of a recurrence to the old play in all its parts; but a harlotry play-actor might think it hard upon him to be deprived of a "point," pointless as that point may be.

Haste is made a remarkable characteristic of Romeo, —because it is at once the parent and the child of uniform misfortune. As from the acorn springs the oak, and from the oak the acorn, so does the temperament that inclines to haste predispose to misadventure, and a continuance of misadventure confirms the habit of haste. A man whom his rashness has made continually unlucky, is strengthened in the determination

to persevere in his rapid movements by the very feeling that the "run" is against him, and that it is of no use to think. In the case of Romeo, he leaves it all to the steerage of Heaven, *i. e.* to the heady current of his own passions; and he succeeds accordingly. All through the play care is taken to show his impatience. The very first word he speaks indicates that he is anxious for the quick passage of time.

Ben. Good morrow, cousin.

Rom. Is the day so young?

Ben. But new struck nine.

Rom. Ay me, sad hours seem long."

The same impatience marks his speech in the moment of death:

"O true apothecary,
Thy drugs are quick!"

From his first words to his last the feeling is the same. The lady of his love, even in the full swell of her awakened affections, cannot avoid remarking that his contract is

"Too rash, too unadvised, too sudden,
Too like the lightning, which does cease to be
Ere one can say, It lightens."

When he urges his marriage on the friar,

Rom. O let us home: I stand on sudden haste.

Friar. Wisely and slow. They stumble that run fast."

The metaphors put into his mouth are remarkable for their allusions to abrupt and violent haste. He wishes that he may die

“As violently as hasty powder fired
Doth hurry from the fatal cannon’s womb.”

When he thinks that Juliet mentions his name in anger, it is

“as if that name,
Shot from the deadly level of a gun,
Did murder her.”

When Lawrence remonstrates with him on his violence, he compares the use to which he puts his wit to

“Powder in a skilless soldier’s flask;”

and tells him that

“Violent delights have violent ends,
And in their triumph die ; like fire and powder,
Which, as they kiss, consume.”

Lightning, flame, shot, explosion, are the favourite parallels to the conduct and career of Romeo. Swift are his loves ; as swift to enter his thought, the mischief which ends them for ever. Rapid have been all the pulsations of his life ; as rapid the determination which decides that they shall beat no more.

A gentleman he was in heart and soul. All his

habitual companions love him : Benvolio and Mercutio, who represent the young gentlemen of his house, are ready to peril their lives, and to strain all their energies, serious or gay, in his service. His father is filled with an anxiety on his account so delicate, that he will not venture to interfere with his son's private sorrows, while he desires to discover their source, and if possible to relieve them. The heart of his mother bursts in his calamity; the head of the rival house bestows upon him the warmest panegyrics; the tutor of his youth sacrifices everything to gratify his wishes; his servant, though no man is a hero to his *valet de chambre*, dares not remonstrate with him on his intentions, even when they are avowed to be savage-wild,

“ More fierce and more inexorable far,
Than empty tigers or the roaring sea,”—

but with an eager solicitude he breaks his commands by remaining as close as he can venture, to watch over his safety. Kind is he to all. He wins the heart of the romantic Juliet by his tender gallantry: the worldly-minded nurse praises him for being as gentle as a lamb. When it is necessary or natural that the Prince or Lady Montague should speak harshly of him, it is done in his absence. No words of anger or reproach are

addressed to his ears save by Tybalt; and from him they are in some sort a compliment, as signifying that the self-chosen prize-fighter of the opposing party deems Romeo the worthiest antagonist of his blade. We find that he fights two blood-stained duels, but both are forced upon him; the first under circumstances impossible of avoidance, the last after the humblest supplications to be excused.

“O begone!

By Heaven, I love thee better than myself,
For I came hither armed against myself.
Stay not; begone!—live, and hereafter say
A madman’s mercy bade thee run away.”

With all the qualities and emotions which can inspire affection and esteem,—with all the advantages that birth, heaven, and earth could at once confer,—with the most honourable feelings and the kindest intentions,—he is eminently an unlucky man. The record of his actions in the play before us does not extend to the period of a week; but we feel that there is no dramatic straining to shorten their course. Everything occurs naturally and probably. It was his concluding week; but it tells us all his life. Fortune was against him; and would have been against him, no matter that might have been his pursuit. He was born to

win battles, but to lose campaigns. If we desired to moralize with the harsh-minded satirist, who never can be suspected of romance, we should join with him in extracting as a moral from the play

“Nullum habes numen, si sit prudentia; sed te
Nos facimus, Fortuna, deam, cœloque locamus;”

and attribute the mishaps of Romeo, not to want of fortune, but of prudence. Philosophy and poetry differ not in essentials, and the stern censure of Juvenal is just. But still, when looking on the timeless tomb of Romeo, and contemplating the short and sad career through which he ran, we cannot help recollecting his mourning words over his dying friend, and suggest as an inscription over the monument of the luckless gentleman,

“I THOUGHT ALL FOR THE BEST.”

MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM.

BOTTOM, THE WEAVER.



"Some men are born with a silver spoon in their mouths, and others with a wooden ladle."—*Ancient Proverb.*

"Then did the sun on dunghill shine."—*Ancient Pistol.*

It has often been remarked that it is impossible to play the enchanted scenes of Bottom with any effect. In reading the poem we idealize the ass-head; we can conceive that it represents in some grotesque sort the various passions and emotions of its wearer; that it assumes a character of dull jocosity, or duller sapience, in his conversations with Titania and the fairies; and when calling for the assistance of Messrs. Peas-blossom and Mustard-seed to scratch his head, or of the Queen to procure him a peck of provender or a bottle of hay, it expresses some puzzled wonder of the new sensations its wearer must experience in tinglings never felt before, and cravings for food until then unsuited to his appetite. But on the stage this is impossible. As the manager cannot procure for his fairies representatives of such tiny dimensions as to be in danger of being overflowed by the bursting of the honey-bag of an humble-bee, so it is impossible that the art of the

property-man can furnish Bottom with an ass-head capable of expressing the mixed feelings of humanity and asinity which actuate the metamorphosed weaver. It is but a pasteboard head, and that is all. The jest is over the first moment after his appearance; and, having laughed at it once, we cannot laugh at it any more. As in the case of a man who, at a masquerade, has chosen a character depending for its attraction merely on costume,—we may admire a Don Quixote, if properly bedecked in Mambrino's helmet and the other habiliments of the Knight of La Mancha, at a first glance, but we think him scarcely worthy of a second.

So it is with the Bottom of the stage; the Bottom of the poem is a different person. Shakspeare in many parts of his plays drops hints, “vocal to the intelligent,” that he feels the difficulty of bringing his ideas adequately before the minds of theatrical spectators. In the opening address of the Chorus of *Henry V.* he asks pardon for having dared

“On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth
So great an object. Can this cockpit hold
The vasty fields of France? or, may we cram
Within this wooden O, the very casques
That did affright the air at Agincourt?”

and requests his audience to piece out the imperfec-

tions of the theatre with their thoughts. This is an apology for the ordinary and physical defects of any stage,—especially an ill-furnished one; and it requires no great straining of our imaginary forces to submit to them. Even Ducrow himself, with appliances and means to boot a hundredfold more magnificent and copious than any that were at the command of Shakspeare, does not deceive us into the belief that his fifty horses, trained and managed with surpassing skill, and mounted by agile and practised riders, dressed in splendid and carefully-considered costumes, are actually fighting the battle of Waterloo, but we willingly lend ourselves to the delusion. In like manner, we may be sure that in the days of Queen Elizabeth the audience of the Globe complied with the advice of Chorus, and,

“ Minding true things by what their mockeries be,”

were contented that

“ Four or five most vile and ragged foils
Right ill-disposed, in brawl ridiculous,”

should serve to represent to their imagination the name of Agincourt.

We consent to this just as we do to Greeks and Romans speaking English on the stage of London, or

French on that of Paris; or to men of any country speaking in verse at all; or to all the other demands made upon our belief in playing. We can dispense with the assistance of such downright matter-of-fact interpreters as those who volunteer their services to assure us that the lion in *Pyramus and Thisbe* is not a lion in good earnest, but merely Snug the joiner. But there are difficulties of a more subtle and metaphysical kind to be got over, and to these, too, Shakspeare not unfrequently alludes. In the play before us,—*Midsummer Night's Dream*,—for example, when Hippolita speaks scornfully of the tragedy in which Bottom holds so conspicuous a part, Theseus answers, that the best of this kind (scenic performances) are but shadows, and the worst no worse if imagination amend them. She answers that it must be *your* imagination then, not *theirs*. He retorts with a joke on the vanity of actors, and the conversation is immediately changed. The meaning of the Duke is, that however we may laugh at the silliness of Bottom and his companions in their ridiculous play, the author labours under no more than the common calamity of dramatists. They are all but dealers in shadowy representations of life; and if the worst among them can set the mind of the spectator at work, he is equal to the best. The answer to Theseus

is, that none but the best, or, at all events, those who approach to excellence, can call with success upon imagination to invest their shadows with substance. Such playwrights as Quince the carpenter,—and they abound in every literature and every theatre,—draw our attention so much to the absurdity of the performance actually going on before us, that we have no inclination to trouble ourselves with considering what substance in the background their shadows should have represented. Shakspeare intended the remark as a compliment or a consolation to less successful wooers of the comic or the tragic Muse, and touches briefly on the matter; but it was also intended as an excuse for the want of effect upon the stage of some of the finer touches of such dramatists as himself, and an appeal to all true judges of poetry to bring it before the tribunal of their own imagination; making but a matter of secondary inquiry how it appears in a theatre, as delivered by those who, whatever others may think of them, would, if taken at their own estimation, “pass for excellent men.” His own magnificent creation of fairy land in the Athenian wood must have been in his mind, and he asks an indulgent play of fancy not more for Oberon and Titania, the glittering rulers of the elements, who meet

“—— on hill, in dale, forest, or mead,
By paved fountain, or by rushy brook,
Or on the beached margent of the sea,
To dance their ringlets to the whistling wind,”

than for the shrewd and knavish Robin Goodfellow, the lord of practical jokes, or the dull and conceited Bottom, “the shallowest thickskin of the barren sort,” rapt so wondrously from his loom and shuttle, his threads and thrums, to be the favoured lover of the Queen of Faëry, fresh from the spiced Indian air, and lulled with dances and delight amid the fragrance of the sweetest flowers, filling with their luscious perfume a moonlighted forest.

One part of Bottom's character is easily understood, and is often well acted. Amid his own companions he is the cock of the walk. His genius is admitted without hesitation. When he is lost in the wood, Quince gives up the play as marred. There is no man in Athens able to take the first part in tragedy but himself. Flute declares that he has the best wit of any handicraftman in the city. This does not satisfy the still warmer admirer,* who insists on the goodliness of his person,

* Act iv. sc. 2. Athens.—Quince's House.—Enter Quince, Flute, Snout, and Starveling.

“*Qui.* Have you sent to Bottom's house yet, &c.?”

and the fineness of his voice. When it seems hopeless that he should appear, the cause of the stage is given up as utterly lost. When he returns, it is hailed as the "courageous day," and the "happy hour," which is to restore the legitimate drama. It is no wonder that this perpetual flattery fills him with a most inordinate opinion of his own powers. There is not a part in the play

Flu. He hath simply the best wit of any man in Athens.

Qui. Yea, and the best person too; and he is a very paramour for a sweet voice.

Flu. You must say paragon; a paramour is, God bless us! a thing of naught."

I propose that the second admirer's speech be given to Snout, who else has not anything to say, and is introduced on the stage to no purpose. The few words he says elsewhere in the play are all ridiculous; and the mistake of "paramour" for "paragon" is more appropriate to him than to Quince, who corrects the *cacology* of Bottom himself. [Act. iii. sc. 1.

"*Pyr.* Thisby, the flower of odious savours sweet.

Qui. Odours—odours."]

And, besides, Quince, the playwright, manager, and ballad-monger,

["I'll get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream," says Bottom,]

is of too much importance in the company to be rebuked by so inferior a personage as Flute. In the original draft of their play Snout was to perform Pyramus's father, and Quince, Thisbe's father, but those parts are omitted; Snout is the representative of Wall, and Quince has no part assigned him. Perhaps this was intentional, as another proof of bungling.

which he cannot perform. As a lover he promises to make the audience weep ; but his talent is still more shining in the Herculean vein of a tyrant. The manliness of his countenance, he admits, incapacitates him from acting the part of a heroine ; but, give him a mask, and he is sure to captivate by the soft melody of his voice. But, lest it should be thought this melodious softness was alone his characteristic, he claims the part of the lion, which he is to discharge with so terrific a roar as to call forth the marked approbation of the war-like Duke ; and yet, when the danger is suggested of frightening the ladies, who all, Amazons as they were, must be daunted by sounds so fear-inspiring, he professes himself gifted with a power of compass capable of imitating, even in the character of a roaring lion, the gentleness of the sucking dove, or the sweetness of the nightingale. He is equally fit for all parts, and in all parts calculated to outshine the rest. This is allowed ; but, as it is impossible that he can perform them all, he is restricted to the principal. It is with the softest compliments that he is induced to abandon the parts of Thisbe and the lion for that of Pyramus. Quince assures him that he can play none other, because “ Pyramus is a sweet-faced man ; a proper man as one shall see in a summer’s day ; a most lovely, gentleman-

like man; *therefore* YOU must undertake it." What man of woman born could resist flattery so unsparingly administered? the well-puffed performer consents, and though he knows nothing of the play, and is unable to tell whether the part for which he is cast is that of a lover or a tyrant, undertakes to discharge it with a calm and heroic indifference as to the colour of the beard he is to wear, being confident, under any circumstances, of success, whether that most important part of the costume be straw-coloured or orange-tawny, French crown or purple in grain. With equal confidence he gets through his performance. The wit of the courtiers, or the presence of the Duke, have no effect upon his nerves. He alone speaks to the audience in his own character, not for a moment sinking the personal consequence of Bottom in the assumed port of Pyramus. He sets Theseus right on a point of the play with cool importance; and replies to the jest of Demetrius (which he does not understand) with the self-command of ignorant indifference. We may be sure that he was abundantly contented with his appearance, and retired to drink in, with ear well deserving of the promotion it had attained under the patronage of Robin Goodfellow, the applause of his companions. It is true that Oberon designates him as a "hateful fool;" that Puck stigmatizes him as the

greatest blockhead of the set; that the audience of wits and courtiers before whom he has performed vote him to be an ass: but what matter is that? He mixes not with them; he hears not their sarcasms; he could not understand their criticisms; and, in the congenial company of the crew of patches and base mechanicals who admire him, lives happy in the fame of being *the* Nicholas Bottom, who, by consent, to him universal and world-encompassing, is voted to be *the* Pyramus,—*the* prop of the stage,—*the* sole support of the drama.

Self-conceit, as great and undisguised as that of poor Bottom, is to be found in all classes and in all circles, and is especially pardonable in what it is considered genteel or learned to call “the histrionic profession.” The triumphs of the player are evanescent. In no other department of intellect, real or simulated, does the applause bestowed upon the living artist bear so melancholy a disproportion to the repute awaiting him after the generation passes which has witnessed his exertions. According to the poet himself, the poor player

“Struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more.”

Shakspeare's own rank as a performer was not high, and his reflections on the business of an actor are

in general splenetic and discontented. He might have said,—though indeed it would not have fitted with the mood of mind of the despairing tyrant into whose mouth the reflection is put,—that the well-graced actor, who leaves the scene not merely after strutting and fretting, but after exhibiting power and genius to the utmost degree at which his art can aim, amid the thundering applause,—or, what is a deeper tribute, the breathless silence of excited and agitated thousands,—is destined ere long to an oblivion as undisturbed as that of his humbler fellow-artist, whose prattle is without contradiction voted to be tedious. Kemble is fading fast from our view. The gossip connected with everything about Johnson keeps Garrick before us, but the interest concerning him daily becomes less and less. Of Betterton, Booth, Quin, we remember little more than the names. The Lowins and Burbages of the days of Shakspeare are known only to the dramatic antiquary, or the poring commentator, anxious to preserve every scrap of information that may bear upon the elucidation of a text, or aid towards the history of the author. With the sense of this transitory fame before them, it is only natural that players should grasp at as much as comes within their reach while they have power of doing so. It would be a curious

speculation to inquire which personally has the greater enjoyment,—the author, neglected in life, and working for immortal renown, or the actor living among huzzas, and consigned to forgetfulness the moment that his hour is past. I suppose, on the usual principle of compensation, each finds in himself springs of happiness and self-comfort. The dim distance, in its shadowy and limitless grandeur, fills with solemn musings the soul of the one; the gorgeous gilding of the sunny scenery in the foreground kindles with rapturous joy the heart of the other. Shenstone lays it down as a principle, that, if it were left to our choice whether all persons should speak ill of us to our faces, and with applause behind our backs, or, *vice versâ*, that the applause should be lavished upon ourselves, and the ill-speaking kept for our absence, we should choose the latter; because, if we never heard the evil report, we should know nothing about our bad reputation, while, on the contrary, the good opinion others entertained of us would be of no avail if nothing reached our ears but words of anger or reproach. Since, after all, it is from within, and not from without, the sources of joy or sorrow bubble up, it does not matter so very much as the sensitive Lord of Leasowes imagines what the opinions of others concerning us may

be,—at least as compared with those which, right or wrong, we form of ourselves. The question is of no great practical importance ; and yet it would be somewhat curious to speculate in the manner of Hamlet, if we could do so, on the feelings of Kean and Wordsworth in the zenith of the popularity of the former, when he was worshipped as a demi-god by the unquestionable, or, at least, the scarce-questioned dispensers of daily renown ; while the other by the recognised oracles of critical sagacity was set down as a jackass more obtuse than that belaboured by his own Peter Bell.

Pardon, therefore, the wearers of the sock and buskin for being obnoxious to such criticism as that lavished by Quince upon Bottom. We have no traces left us of what constituted the ordinary puffery of the Elizabethan days ; but, as human nature is the same in all ages, we must suppose the trade to have been in its own way as vigorously carried on then as now. And, without hinting at anything personal, do we not week after week find attached to every performer making (whether with justice or not is no part of the consideration) pretensions to the omnifarious abilities of Bottom, some Peter Quince, who sticks to that Bottom with the tenacity of a leech, and is ready to

swear that *he*, the Bottom, is the only man in Athens; that his appearance spreads an universal joy; his occultation involves the world in dramatical eclipse; that his performance of the lover can only be surpassed by his performance of the tyrant; and that it must puzzle an impartial public to decide whether nature and art, genius and study, designed him for a heroine couchant, or a rampant lion. To this it is little wonder that the object of applause lets down his ears too often donkey-like, and permits himself to be scratched by a Master Cobweb, spun though he be by a bottle-bellied spider, or a Master Peas-blossom, who can only claim Mistress Squash for his mother and Master Peascod for his father. In Peter Quince, Shakspeare shadowed forth, by anticipation, Sheridan's Puff. Quince is a fool, and Puff a rogue; and yet I think the criticism of the elder reviewer just as valuable. It is in the end as useful to the object of applause to be told, in plain terms, that he alone can act Pyramus because he is a sweet-faced man, a proper man, a most lovely, gentlemanlike man, as to have the same flummery administered under the guise of mock philosophy, with gabbling intonations about breadth, profoundness, depth, length, thickness, and so forth; which, being interpreted, signify, in many cases, "I

know nothing about acting or writing, but I do know that you can give me a box or a dinner, and therefore let me play to your Bottom, Quince the carpenter, in an ass's head, intended as a representation of Aristotle the Stagirite."

Alas ! I am wandering far away from the forest. I can only plead that my guide has led me into my own congenial land of newspaper from his native soil of poetry. But he never long remains out of his own domain, and the jokes and jests upon the unlucky company who undertook to perform

"A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus
And his love Thisbe, very tragical mirth,"

are but intrusive matter amid the romantic loves, all chivalrous and a little classical, of Theseus and Hippolyta, and the jealousies unearthly, and yet so earthly, of Fairy Land. The romance of early Greece was sometimes strangely confused by the romance of the middle ages. It would take a long essay on the mixture of legends derived from all ages and countries to account for the production of such a personage as the "Duke ycleped Theseus" and his following; and the fairy mythology of the most authentic superstitions would be ransacked in vain to discover exact authorities for the

Shakspearian Oberon and Titania. But, no matter whence derived, the author knew well that in his hands the chivalrous and classical, the airy and the imaginative, were safe. It was necessary for his drama to introduce among his fairy party a creature of earth's mould, and he has so done it as in the midst of his mirth to convey a picturesque satire on the fortune which governs the world, and upon those passions which elsewhere he had with agitating pathos to depict. As Romeo, the gentleman, is *the* unlucky man of Shakspeare so here does he exhibit Bottom, the blockhead, as *the* lucky man, as him on whom Fortune showers her favours beyond measure.

This is the part of the character which cannot be performed. It is here that the greatest talent of the actor must fail in answering the demand made by the author upon our imagination. The utmost lavish of poetry, not only of high conception, but of the most elaborate working in the musical construction of the verse, and a somewhat recondite searching after all the topics favourable to the display of poetic eloquence in the ornamental style, is employed in the description of the fairy scenes and those who dwell therein. Language more brilliantly bejewelled with whatever tropes and figures rhetoricians catalogue in their books is not to be found than what is

scattered forth with copious hand in *Midsummer Night's Dream*. The compliment to Queen Elizabeth,

“In maiden meditation fancy-free,”

was of necessity sugared with all the sweets that the *bon-bon* box of the poet could supply ; but it is not more ornamented than the passages all around. The pastoral images of Corin

“Playing on pipes of corn, and versing love
To amorous Phillida ;”

the homely consequences resulting from the fairy quarrel,

“The ox hath therefore stretch'd his yoke in vain,
The ploughman lost his sweat, and the green corn
Hath rotted ere his youth attain'd a beard ;
The fold stands empty in the drowned field,
And crows are fatted with the murrain flock ;”

and so on, are ostentatiously contrasted with misfortunes more metaphorically related :

“We see
The seasons alter ; hoary-headed frosts
Fall on the fresh lap of the crimson rose ;
And on old Hyems' chin and icy crown
An odorous chaplet of sweet summer buds
Is, as in mockery, set.”

The mermaid chaunting on the back of her dolphin ; the fair vestal throned in the west ; the bank blowing with wild thyme, and decked with oxlip and nodding violet ; the roundelay of the fairies singing their queen to sleep ; and a hundred images beside of aërial grace and mythic beauty, are showered upon us ; and in the midst of these splendours is tumbled in Bottom the weaver, blockhead by original formation, and rendered doubly ridiculous by his partial change into a literal jackass. He, the most unfitted for the scene of all conceivable personages, makes his appearance, not as one to be expelled with loathing and derision, but to be instantly accepted as the chosen lover of the Queen of the Fairies. The gallant train of Theseus traverse the forest, but they are not the objects of such fortune. The lady, under the oppression of the glamour cast upon her eyes by the juice of love-in-idleness, reserves her raptures for an absurd clown. Such are the tricks of Fortune.

Oberon, himself, angry as he is with the caprices of his queen, does not anticipate any such object for her charmed affections. He is determined that she is to be captivated by “some vile thing,” but he thinks only of

“Ounce, or cat or bear,
Pard, or boar with bristled hair,”

animals suggesting ideas of spite or terror ; but he does not dream that, under the superintendence of Puck, spirit of mischief, she is to be enamoured of the head of an ass surmounting the body of a weaver. It is so nevertheless ; and the love of the lady is as desperate as the deformity of her choice. He is an angel that wakes her from her flowery bed ; a gentle mortal, whose enchanting note wins her ear, while his beauteous shape enthralls her eye ; one who is as wise as he is beautiful ; one for whom all the magic treasures of the fairy kingdom are to be with surpassing profusion dispensed. For him she gathers whatever wealth and delicacies the Land of Faëry can boast. Her most airy spirits are ordered to be kind and courteous to this *gentleman*,—for into that impossible character has the blindness of her love transmuted the clumsy and conceited clown. Apricocks and dewberries, purple grapes, green figs, and mulberries, are to feed his coarse palate ; the thighs of bees, kindled at the eyes of fiery glow-worms, are to light him to his flower-decked bed ; wings plucked from painted butterflies are to fan the moonbeams from him as he sleeps ; and in the very desperation of her intoxicating passion she feels that there is nothing which should not be yielded to the strange idol of her soul. She mourns over the restraints which separate her from

the object of her burning affection, and thinks that the moon and the flowers participate in her sorrow.

“ The moon, methinks, looks with a watery eye,
And when she weeps, weeps every little flower,
Lamenting some enforced chastity.”

Abstracting the poetry, we see the same thing every day in the plain prose of the world. Many is the Titania driven by some unintelligible magic so to waste her love. Some juice, potent as that of Puck,—the true Cupid of such errant passions,—often converts in the eyes of woman the grossest defects into resistless charms. The lady of youth and beauty will pass by the attractions best calculated to captivate the opposite sex, to fling herself at the feet of age or ugliness. Another, decked with graces, accomplishments, and the gifts of genius, and full of all the sensibilities of refinement, will squander her affections on some good-for-nothing *roué*, whose degraded habits and pursuits banish him far away from the polished scenes which she adorns. The lady of sixteen quarters will languish for him who has no arms but those which nature has bestowed ; from the midst of the gilded *salon* a soft sigh may be directed towards the thin-clad tenant of a garret ; and the heiress of millions may wish them sunken in the sea if they

form a barrier between her and the penniless lad toiling for his livelihood,

“Lord of his presence, and no land beside.”

Fielding has told us all this in his own way, in a distich, (put, I believe, into the mouth of Lord Grizzle ; but, as I have not the illustrious tragedy in which it appears, before me, I am not certain, and must therefore leave it to my readers to verify this important point.) Love

“Lords into cellars bears,
And bids the brawny porter walk up-stairs.”

Tom Thumb and *Midsummer Night's Dream* preach the one doctrine. It would be amusing to trace the courses of thought by which the heterogeneous minds of Fielding and Shakspeare came to the same conclusion.

Ill-mated loves are generally but of short duration on the side of the nobler party, and she awakes to lament her folly. The fate of those who suffer like Titania is the hardest. The man who is deprived of external graces of appearance may have the power of captivating by those of the mind : wit, polish, fame, may compensate for the want of youth or personal attractions. In poverty or lowly birth may be found all that may worthily inspire devoted affection—

“The rank is but the guinea’s stamp,
The man ’s the gowd for a’ that.”

In the very dunghill of dissipation and disgrace will be raked up occasionally a lurking pearl or two of honourable feeling, or kind emotion, or irregular talent, which may be dwelt upon by the fond eye, wilfully averting its gaze from the miserable mass in which they are buried. But woe unto the unhappy lady who, like Titania, is obliged to confess, when the enchantment has passed by, that she was “enamoured of an *ass!*” She must indeed “loathe his visage,” and the memory of all connected with him is destined ever to be attended by a strong sensation of disgust.

But the ass himself of whom she was enamoured has not been the less a favourite of Fortune, less happy and self-complacent, because of her late repentance. He proceeds onward as luckily as ever. Bottom, during the time that he attracts the attentions of Titania, never for a moment thinks there is anything extraordinary in the matter. He takes the love of the Queen of the Fairies as a thing of course, orders about her tiny attendants as if they were so many apprentices at his loom, and dwells in Fairy Land unobservant of its wonders, as quietly as if he were still in his workshop. Great is the courage and self-possession of an ass-head.

Theseus would have bent in reverent awe before Titania. Bottom treats her as carelessly as if she were the wench of the next-door tapster. Even Christopher Sly,* when

* In comparing the characters of Sly and Bottom, we must be struck with the remarkable profusion of picturesque and classical allusions with which both these buffoons are surrounded. I have quoted some of the passages from *Midsummer Night's Dream* above. The Induction to the *Taming of the Shrew* is equally rich. There, too, we have the sylvan scenery and the cheerful sport of the huntsman, and there we also have references to Apollo and Semiramis; to Cytherea all in sedges hid; to Io as she was a maid; to Daphne roaming through a thorny wood. The coincidence is not casual. Shakspeare desired to elevate the scenes in which such grovelling characters played the principal part by all the artificial graces of poetry, and to prevent them from degenerating into mere farce. As I am on the subject, I cannot refrain from observing that the remarks of Bishop Hurd on the character of the Lord in the Induction to the *Taming of the Shrew* are marked by a ridiculous impertinence, and an ignorance of criticism truly astonishing. They are made to swell, however, the strange farrago of notes gathered by the variorum editors. The next editor may safely spare them.

I have not troubled my readers with verbal criticism in this paper, but I shall here venture on one conjectural emendation. Hermia, chiding Demetrius, says, Act iii. sc. 2,

“If thou hast slain Lysander in his sleep,
Being o'er shoes in blood, wade in *the* deep,
And kill me too.”

Should we not read “*knee* deep?” As you are already over your shoes, wade on until the bloody tide reaches your knees. In Shakspeare's time *knee* was generally spelt *kne*; and between *the* and *kne* there is not much difference in writing.

he finds himself transmuted into a lord, shows some signs of astonishment. He does not accommodate himself to surrounding circumstances. The first order he gives is for a pot of small ale; and after all the elegant luxuries of his new situation have been placed ostentatiously before him—after he has smelt sweet savours, and felt soft things—after he begins to think he is

“A lord, indeed,
And not a tinker nor Christopher[o] Sly;”

even then nature—or habit, which stands in the place of nature,—recurs invincible, and once more he calls for a pot of the smallest ale. (I may again cite Fielding in illustration of Shakspeare; for do we not read, in the Covent Garden tragedy, of the consolation that

“Cold small beer is to the waking drunkard;”

and do we not hear the voice of Christopher Sly praying, for God's sake, in the midst of his lordly honours, for a draught of that unlordly but long-accustomed beverage?) In the *Arabian Night's Entertainments* a similar trick is played by the Caliph Haroun Al-raschid upon Abou Hassan, and he submits, with much reluctance, to believe himself the Commander of the Faithful. But having in vain sought how to explain

the enigma, he yields to the belief, and then performs all the parts assigned to him, whether of business or pleasure, of counsel or gallantry, with the easy self-possession of a practised gentleman. Bottom has none of the scruples of the tinker of Burton-heath, or the *bon vivant* of Bagdad. He sits down amid the fairies as one of themselves without any astonishment; but so far from assuming, like Abou Hassan, the manners of the court where he has been so strangely intruded, he brings the language and bearing of the booth into the glittering circle of Queen Titania. He would have behaved in the same manner on the throne of the caliph, or in the bedizened chamber of the lord; and the ass-head would have victoriously carried him through.

Shakspeare has not taken the trouble of working out the conclusion of the adventure of Sly; and the manner in which it is finished in the old play where he found him, is trifling and common-place. The Arabian novelist repeats the jest upon his hero, and concludes by placing him as a favourite in the court of the amused caliph. This is the natural ending of such an adventure; but, as Bottom's was supernatural, it was to conclude differently. He is therefore dismissed to his ordinary course of life, unaffected

by what has passed. He admits at first that it is wonderful, but soon thinks it is nothing more than a fit subject for a ballad in honour of his own name. He falls at once to his old habit of dictating, boasting, and swaggering, and makes no reference to what has happened to him in the forest. It was no more than an ordinary passage in his daily life. Fortune knew where to bestow her favours.

Adieu then, Bottom the weaver ! and long may you go onward prospering in your course ! But the prayer is needless, for you carry about you the infallible talisman of the ass-head. You will be always sure of finding a Queen of the Fairies to heap her favours upon you, while to brighter eyes and nobler natures she remains invisible or averse. Be you ever the chosen representative of the romantic and the tender before dukes and princesses ; and if the judicious laugh at your efforts, despise them in return, setting down their criticism to envy. This you have a right to do. Have they, with all their wisdom and wit, captivated the heart of a Titania as you have done ? Not they—nor will they ever. Prosper therefore, with undoubting heart despising the rabble of the wise. Go on your path rejoicing ; assert loudly your claim to fill every character in life ; and may you

be quite sure that as long as the noble race of the Bottoms continues to exist, the chances of extraordinary good luck will fall to their lot, while in the ordinary course of life they will never be unattended by the plausible criticism of a Peter Quince.

HIS LADIES.—LADY MACBETH.

“Then gently scan your brother man,
More gently sister woman.” BURNS.

“Je donne mon avis, non comme bon, mais comme mien.”
MONTAIGNE.

THE ladies of Shakspeare have of course riveted the attention, and drawn to them the sympathies, of all who have read or seen his plays. The book-trained critic, weighing words and sentences in his closet; the romantic poet, weaving his verses by grove or stream; the polished occupant of the private box; the unwashed brawler of the gallery; the sedate visitant of the pit, are touched each in his several way by the conjugal devotion and melancholy fate of Desdemona, the high-souled principle of Isabella, the enthusiastic love and tragic end of Juliet, the maternal agonies of Constance, the stern energies of Margaret of Anjou, the lofty resignation of Katharine, the wit and romance of Rosalind, frolic of tongue, but

deeply feeling at heart; the accomplished coquetries of Cleopatra, redeemed and almost sanctified by her obedient rushing to welcome death at the call ringing in her ears from the grave of her self-slain husband; the untiring affection of Imogen, Ophelia's stricken heart and maddened brain, or the filial constancy of Cordelia. Less deeply marked, but all in their kind beautiful, are the innocence of Miranda, the sweetness of Anne Page, the meek bearing—beneath the obtrusion of undesired honours—of Anne Boleyn, the playful fondness of Jessica;—but I should run through all the catalogue of Shakspeare's plays were I to continue the enumeration. The task is unnecessary, for they dwell in the hearts of all, of every age, and sex, and condition. They nestle in the bosoms of the wise and the simple, the sedentary and the active, the moody and the merry, the learned and the illiterate, the wit of the club, the rustic of the farm, the soldier in camp, the scholar in college; and it affords a remarkable criterion of their general effect, that, even in those foreign countries which, either from imperfect knowledge, defective taste, or national prejudice, set little value on the plays of Shakspeare,—while Hamlet, Richard, Macbeth, King John, Lear, and Falstaff, are unknown or rejected, the names of Desdemona and Juliet are as familiar as household words.

No writer ever created so many female characters, or placed them in situations of such extreme diversity ; and in none do we find so lofty an appreciation of female excellence. The stories from which the great dramatists of Athens drew their plots were, in most of their striking incidents, derogatory to woman. The tale of Troy divine, the war of Thebes, the heroic legends, were their favourite, almost their exclusive sources ; and the crimes, passions, and misfortunes of Clytemnestra and Medea, Phædra and Jocasta, could only darken the scene. An adulterous spouse aiding in the murder of her long-absent lord, the King of men, returning crowned with conquest ; a daughter participating in the ruthless avenging by death inflicted on a mother by a son ; an unpitying sorceress killing her children to satiate rage against her husband ; a faithless wife endeavouring to force her shameless love on her step-son, and by false accusation consigning him for his refusal to destruction beneath his father's curse ; a melancholy queen linked in incestuous nuptials to her own offspring ;—these ladies are the heroines of the most renowned of the Greek tragedies ! and the consequences of their guilt or misfortune compose the fable of many more. In some of the Greek plays, as the *Eumenides*, we have no female characters except the

unearthly habitants of heaven or hell; in the most wondrous of them all, Prometheus Fettered, appears only the mythic Io; in the Persians, only the ghost of Atossa, who scarcely appertains to womankind: in some, as Philoctetes, women form no part of the *dramatis personæ*; in others, as the Seven against Thebes, they are of no importance to the action of the piece; or, as in the Suppliants, serve but as the Chorus; and, in many more, are of less than secondary importance. Euripides often makes them the objects of those ungallant reflections which consign the misogynic dramatist to such summary punishment from the irritated sex in the comedies of Aristophanes; and in the whole number, in the thirty-three plays extant, there are but two women who can affect our nobler or softer emotions. The tender and unremitting care of Antigone for her blind, forlorn, and aged father, her unbending determination to sacrifice her lover and her life sooner than fail in paying funeral honours to her fallen brother; and, in Alcestis, her resolute urging that her own life should be taken to preserve that of a beloved husband,—invest them with a pathetic and heroic beauty. But, in the one, we are haunted by the horrid recollections of incest and fratricide; and in the other we are somewhat indignant that we should be forced to sympathize

with an affection squandered upon so heartless a fellow as Admetus, who suffers his wife to perish in his stead with the most undisturbed conviction of the superior value of his own existence, pouring forth all the while the most melodious lamentations over her death, but never for a moment thinking of coming forward to prevent it. They are beautiful creations, nevertheless.

The Greek dramatists were in a great measure bound to a particular class of subjects ; but, in general, the manner in which an author treats the female character, affords one of the main criteria by which the various gradations of genius may be estimated. By the highest genius woman is always spoken of with a deep feeling of the most reverential delicacy. Helen is the cause of the war immortalized by the Iliad ; but no allusion to her lapse is made throughout the poem save by herself, deploring in bitter accents what she has done. She wishes that she had died an evil death before she followed Paris ; she acknowledges herself to be unworthy of the kindred of those whom she describes as deserving of honour ; her conscience suggests that her far-famed brothers, “whom one mother bore,” are in the field when the warring chieftains meet in truce, but dare not show themselves among their peers through shame of the disgrace she has entailed upon them ; and,

at the last, she lays bare her internal feeling that insult is the lot she deserves by the warm gratitude with which she acknowledges, in her bitter lament over the corse of Hector, that he had the generosity never to address her with upbraiding. The wrath of Achilles is roused for the injury inflicted upon him by carrying off Briseis, dear to his heart, "spear-captured as she was." She is restored by the penitent Agamemnon, with solemn vows that she returns pure and uninsulted. Of Andromache I think it unnecessary to speak. In the Odyssey, it is true, we have Circe and Calypso; but they are goddesses couching with a mortal, and excite no human passion. We meet them in the region of "*speciosa miracula*," where Cyclops, and Sirius, and Lotus-eaters dwell; where the King of the winds holds his court, and whence is the passage to Erebus. In that glorious mixture of adventure and allegory,—the Voyage of Ulysses,—we may take those island beauties to be the wives and sweethearts whom sailors meet in every port; or, following the stream of moralists and commentators, look upon the fable to be no more than

"Truth severe in fairy fiction dressed."

In other parts of the poem we might wish for more warm-heartedness in Penelope; but under her circum-

stances caution is excusable, and she must be admitted to be a pattern of constancy and devotion. The Helen of the *Odyssey* is a fine continuation of the Helen of the *Iliad*. Still full of kindly feminine impulses, still sorrowing when she thinks of the misfortunes she has occasioned, her griefs have lost the intense poignancy with which they afflicted her while leading a life degrading her in her own eyes, and exposing her to affronts of which she could not complain. Restored to the husband of her early affections, consoled by his pardon, and dwelling once more amid the scenes of her youth,—absence from which, and absence so occasioned, she had never ceased to regret in wasting floods of tears,—the Helen of the *Odyssey* comes before us no longer uttering the accents of ceaseless self-reproach, but soothed, if not pacified, in soul. We have the *lull* after the tempest,—the calm following the whirlwind.

Virgil is a great poet indeed, though few will now agree with Scaliger that he is equal, far less superior, to Homer. Dido is the blot upon the *Æneid*. The loves of the Carthaginian queen might have made, and in the hands of Virgil would have made, a charming poem, treated separately,—a poem far superior in execution to the *Hero and Leander* of Musæus, but a work of the same order. As it stands, the episode, if

it can be so called, utterly ruins the epic character of the hero. St. Evremond has said that Æneas had all the qualities of a monk; it is plain that he had not the feelings of a gentleman; and we cannot wonder that his first wife wandered from his side, and that he met with so violent an opposition when he sought another. Virgil, after his conduct to Dido, had not the courage to introduce him to Lavinia in person, and leaves him undefended to the angry tongue of her mother. The poet was justly punished for his fourth book; for, in all those which follow, he has not ventured to introduce any female characters but incendiaries, sibyls, shrews, and furies.

When Dante took Virgil as his guide in the infernal regions, he did not follow his master in dwelling on the pleasures or the gentler sorrows of illicit love. His ghostly women appear stern, or subdued of port. The lady who is best known to the English reader, Francesca di Rimini, forms no exception. Nothing can be more grave and solemn than the tale of her hapless passion, as told in the *Inferno*. It is pervaded throughout by such sorrow and remorse as we might expect to find in a region whence hope is excluded. Accordingly how far different is its impression from that left on the mind by the same story when told

merely as a love-tale by Mr. Leigh Hunt. I do not say this in disparagement of that picturesque and graphic poem, the *Story of Rimini*, which has been exposed to the most unjustifiable criticism; but to mark the manner in which men of talent and men of genius handle the same subject. The ladies of Tasso, though not vigorously sketched, and in general imitated from the Latin poets,—I speak of his Jerusalem,—are conceived in a spirit of romantic chivalry; and, even when the witching Armida leads Rinaldo astray, the poet diverts our attention from the blandishments of the enchantress to dazzle us by the wonders of magic groves and gardens. Poor Tasso, besides, wishes to persuade us—perhaps in some moody hours he had persuaded himself—that he intended the whole poem for an allegory, in which Armida was to play some edifying part,—I forget what. In the poets of romance we do not look for the severer style of the epic; but the forest-ranging heroines of Ariosto and Spenser, “roaming the woodland, frank and free,” have an air of self-confiding independence and maiden freshness, worthy of the leafy scenes through which they move, that renders it impossible to approach them with other thoughts than those of chivalrous deference. If Spenser, in his canto of Jealousy, makes the lady of the

victim of that weak passion treat her husband as he had anticipated, why, she errs with no man of mortal mould, but chooses as her mates the jolly satyrs winking in the wood; and Spenser has his allegory too. Ariosto took no trouble to make explanations, being satisfied, I suppose, with the character given of his poetry by Cardinal Hippolyto; and even he has the grace to beg the ladies, to whose service he had from the beginning dedicated his lays, to avert their eyes when he is about to sing the strange adventures of Giocondo.*

* *Orlando Furioso*, canto xxii. st. 1, 2, 3.

I.

“Donne, e voi che le donne avete in pregio,
 Per Dio, non date a questa istoria orecchia,
 A questa che 'l ostier dire in dispregio,
 E in vostra infamia e biasmo s'apparecchia;
 Benche ne macchia vi puo dar ne fregio
 Lingua si vile; e sia l'usanza vecchia,
 Che 'l volgare ignorante ognun riprenda,
 E parlez piu de quel meno intenda.

II.

“Lasciate questo canto, che senz' esso
 Puo star l'istoria, e non sara men chiara;
 Mettendolo Turpino, anch' io l' ò messo,
 Non per malevolenzia, ne per gara;
 Ch' io v' ami oltre mia lingua che l' a expresso,
 Che mai non fu di celebrarvi avara,

The theme of Milton in *Paradise Lost*, hardly admits of the development of ordinary human feelings; but his sole Eve has grace in all her steps, and all her actions too. In *Paradise Regained* his subject was

N' ò falto mille prove, e v' o dimostro
Ch' io son ne potrei esser se non vostro.

III.

“Passi chi vuol tre carte, o quattro, senza
Leggerne verso, e chi pur legge vuole
Gli dia quella medesima credenza,
Che si vuol dare a finzion, e a fole,” &c.

which thus may be rollingly Englished,

Ladies, and you to whom ladies are dear,
For God's sake don't lend to this story an ear.
Care not for fables of slander or blame
Which this scandalous chronicler flings on your name.
Spots that can stain you with slight or with wrong
Cannot be cast by so worthless a tongue.
Well is it known, as an usage of old,
That the ignorant vulgar will ever be bold,
Satire and censure still scattering, and
Talking the most where they least understand.
Passed over unread let this canto remain,
Without it the story will be just as plain.
As Turpin has put it, so *I* put it too;
But not from ill-feeling, dear ladies, to you.
My love to your sex has been shown in my lays;
To you I have never been niggard of praise;
And many a proof I have given which secures
That I am, and can never be other than yours.

badly chosen; and he feared, from religious motives, to introduce the Virgin. In *Comus* his Lady is a model of icy chastity, worthy of the classic verse in which she is embalmed; but Dalilah in *Samson Agonistes* is the more dramatic conception. Ornate and gay, she makes urgent court to her angry husband, with no better fate than to be by him inexorably repelled. She presses upon him all the topics that could lead to reconciliation, but the sense of his wrongs is too acute to allow of pardon; and at last she bursts away with the consoling reflection that, though spurned by him, and made the object of reproach in Israelitish songs,

Skip three or four pages, and read not a word;

Or, if you *will* read it, pray deem it absurd,

As a story in credit not better or worse

Than the foolish old tales you were told by the nurse.

I do not mean to defend my doggrel; but I think Ariosto has not yet had an adequate translator in English, or indeed in any language; nor, in my opinion, will he easily find one. The poem is too long, and requires the aid of the music of the original language to carry the reader through. I do not know what metre in English could contend against the prolixity; but I *do* know that Ariosto sadly wants—as what classic in the vernacular languages does not?—a better critic of his text than he has yet found in Italian.

In the above passage it is somewhat amusing to find Ariosto assuring his readers that they might pass this particular canto, because without it “*puo star l'istoria*,” as if there were a canto in the whole poem of which the same might not be said.

she shall be hymned and honoured in those of her own country as a deliverer. Milton was unhappy in his wives and daughters; and his domestic manners appear to have been harsh and unamiable. In his prose works, his *Tetrachordon* for example, he does not display any kindly feeling for the sex; but when he clothed himself in his singing robes, and soared above the cares of every-day life, to expatiate in the purer regions of poetry, the soul of the poet softened and sublimed; like his own Adam, his sterner nature relented; and, though he could not make Samson pardon Dalilah, he will not let her depart unhonoured. In *Paradise Lost*, he had spoken of her disparagingly,—

“ So rose the Danite strong,
Herculean Samson, from the harlot lap
Of Philistæan Dalilah; ”

but when she comes before him, as it were, in bodily presence, he leaves all the words of reproach to her irritated lord, and suggests to her, topics of self-justification, dismissing her from the stage, not as a faithless wife, but as a heroic woman, who had sacrificed her affections to her country, and who retires after humiliating herself in vain to reap the reward of her patriotic conduct among her people and her kindred.

If we turn from the epic and tragic to the other de-

partments of literature in which genius can be exercised, we shall find the feeling much the same. Those who write from observation of what is going on in the world,—the novelist, the comic writer, the satirist,—must take the world as it is, and lay it before us in its mixture of good and evil. There is no need, however, that the latter should be forcibly thrust upon us. The task of the satirists appears to me the lowest in which talent can be employed. The most famous among them, Juvenal, tells us truly that the *rigidi censura cachinni*—the part chosen by Democritus—is easy to any one. We must rise above it, as he has done in some of his satires,—as in that sublime poem in which the passage occurs, the tenth, or the thirteenth and fourteenth,—and forget the wit or the censor to assume the loftier bearing of the moralist. I should have wondered that the same mind which produced these noble effusions could have perpetrated the enormities of the sixth satire and some others, if I did not reflect that Rome, originally an asylum for robbers, was nothing more than a standing camp, with the virtues and vices, the manners and the feelings of a camp, to the day of its downfall. Rape and violence procured its first women, and it would seem as if the original act had influenced their feelings to the sex throughout. It is certain that theirs is the only

literature in the world in which no female character is delineated worthy of the slightest recollection—a striking circumstance, and well deserving critical investigation; but it would now lead us too far from our subject, from which indeed I have delayed too long already. We must get back to Shakspeare, staying only to remark that if Boccacio and his imitator, Chaucer, have intermingled licentious tales in their miscellaneous collection, they have done so, only in compliance with the supposed necessity of delineating every species of life, and that they hasten to show that they could be of finer spirit when emancipated from the thralldom of custom; that Cervantes chequers the comic of *Don Quixote* with visions of graceful and romantic beauty; and that such will be found to be the case more or less in every composition that takes firm hold of the human mind. I except, of course, works of morals, science, and philosophy: and under those heads must come the unromantic and unpoetic books of wit, and even buffoonery, if they be doomed to last. Rabelais will live for ever to speak vocally to the intelligent; but mere licentiousness must perish. Indulgence in woman-scorning ribaldry inflicts due punishment upon talent itself, if it be prostituted to such miserable work. The melancholy ability which has been so successful in *La*

Pucelle affords a sufficient reason why its author failed when he attempted a *Henriade*.

Supereminent over all the great geniuses of the world and with no others have I compared him—is Shakspeare in his women. Homer was not called upon to introduce them in such number or variety, nor could they enter so intimately into the action of his poems. Still less was there opportunity for their delineation in Milton. But Shakspeare's is the unique merit that, being a dramatist wielding equally the highest tragic and the lowest comic, and therefore compelled to bring females prominently forward in every variety of circumstance, he has carefully avoided themes and situations which might either inspire horror or disgust, or excite licentious feeling. We have in him no Phædra, Clytemnestra or Medea; no story like those of Jocasta, or Monimia, or the Mysterious Mother. He would have recoiled from what is hinted at in *Manfred*. Even the Myrrha of *Sardanapalus* could not have found a place among his heroines. In none of his plots, comic or tragic, does female frailty form an ingredient. The only play in which ladies have been betrayed is *Measure for Measure*; and there he takes care that their misfortune shall be amended, by marrying Mariana to Angelo, and ordering Claudio to restore honour to

Julietta, whom he had wronged. Nowhere else does a similar example occur, and there it is set in strong contrast with the high-toned purity of Isabella. In the instances of slandered women, it seems to delight him to place them triumphant over their slanderers ; as Hero in *Much Ado about Nothing*, Hermione in the *Winter's Tale*, Imogen in *Cymbeline*. All his heroes woo with the most honourable views ; there is no intrigue in any of his plays, no falsehood to the married bed. Those who offer illicit proposals are exposed to ruin and disgrace. Angelo falls from his lofty station. Prince John is driven from his brother's court. Falstaff, the wit and courtier, becomes a butt, when his evil star leads him to make lawless courtship to the Wives of Windsor. The innocent and natural love of Miranda in the *Tempest* affords a striking contrast to the coarse and disgusting passion of Dorinda : a character thrust into the play as an improvement by no less a man than Dryden. Here again we may remark how great is the distance which separates genius of the first order even from that which comes nearest to it. The two most detestable women ever drawn by Shakspeare—Regan and Goneril—are both in love with Edmund ; but we have no notice of their passion until the moment of their death, and then we find that, wicked as were the

thoughts which rankled in their bosoms, no infringement of the laws of chastity was contemplated; marriage was their intention: "I was contracted to them both," says Edmund; "all three now marry in an instant." With his dying breath he bears testimony that in the midst of their crimes they were actuated by the dominant feeling of woman:

"Yet Edmund was beloved;
The one the other poisoned for his sake,
And after slew herself."

Emilia is accused by Iago in soliloquy as being suspected of faithlessness to his bed, but he obviously does not believe the charge:—

"I hate the Moor;
And it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets
He has done my office; *I know not if 't be true,*
But I, for mere suspicion in that kind,
Will do as if for surety."

He uses it merely as an additional excuse for hating the Moor; a palliation to his conscience in the career which he is about to pursue. Queen Gertrude's marriage with her brother-in-law is made the subject of severe animadversion; but it does not appear that she had dishonoured herself in the life of her first husband, or was in any manner participant in the crime of Claudius. Hamlet, in the vehemence of his anger.

never insinuates such a charge; and the Ghost, rising to moderate his violence, acquits her by his very appearance at such a time, of any heinous degree of guilt. As for the gross theory of Tieck respecting Ophelia, it is almost a national insult. He maintains that she had yielded to Hamlet's passion, and that its natural consequences had driven her to suicide. Such a theory is in direct opposition to the retiring and obedient purity of her character, the tenour of her conversations and soliloquies, the general management of the play, and what I have endeavoured to show is the undeviating current of Shakspeare's ideas. If the German critic propounded this heresy to insult English readers through one of their greatest favourites in revenge for the ungallant reason which the Archbishop of Canterbury,* in *Henry V.*, assigns as the origin of the Salique law, he might be pardoned; but, as it is plainly dictated by a spirit of critical wicked-

* *Henry V.* act i. sc. 2. Archbishop Chicheley's argument is

"The land Salique lies in Germany,
Between the floods of Sala and of Elbe,
Where Charles the Great, having subdued the Saxons,
There left behind and settled certain French,
Who, holding in disdain the German women
For some dishonest manners of their life,
Established there this law, to wit, no female
Should be inheritrix in Salique land."

ness and blasphemy, I should consign him, in spite of learning, acuteness, and Shakspearian knowledge, without compassion, to the avenging hands of Lysistrata.*

Such, in the plays where he had to create the characters, was the course of Shakspeare. In the historical plays, where he had to write by the book, it is not at all different. Scandal is carefully avoided. Many spots lie on the fame of Queen Elinor, but no reference is made to them by the hostile tongue which describes the mother-queen as a second Até, stirring her son, King John, to blood and strife. Jane Shore, of whom Rowe, a commentator on Shakspeare too, made a heroine, is not introduced on the stage in *Richard III.* Poor Joan of Arc is used brutally, it must be owned; but it is not till she is driven to the stake that she confesses to an infirmity which not even her barbarous judges can seriously believe. We must observe, besides, that the first part of *Henry VI.* can scarcely be considered a play of Shakspeare, for he did little more than revise the old play of that name. To the charge of the older dramatist, too, must be set the strange exhibition of Margaret of Anjou mourning over the head of the Duke of Suffolk

* Aristoph. Lysistr.

in the second part. When Shakspeare has that vigorous woman to himself, as in *Richard III.*, she shows no traces of such weakness: she is the heroic assertor of her husband's rights, the unsubdued but not-to-be-comforted mourner over her foully slaughtered son. He makes the scenes of the civil wars sad enough; the father kills the son, the son the father, under the eyes of the pitying king; but there is no hint of outrage on women. He contrives to interest us equally in Katharine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn. Everything that poetry can do, is done, to make us forget the faults of Cleopatra, and to incline us to think that a world was well lost for that *petit nez retroussé*. We should in vain search the writings of the Romans themselves for such Roman ladies as those of *Coriolanus* and *Julius Cæsar*. In his camps and armies we have much military tumult and railing, but nowhere the introduction of licentious scenes. If Alcibiades be attended by his Phrynia and Timandra, and Falstaff have his poll clawed like a parrot by Doll Tearsheet, the Athenian ladies are introduced as a vehicle for the fierce misanthropy of Timon, and the fair one of Eastcheap acts as a satire upon the impotent desires of the withered elder, the dead elm, whom she clasps in her venal embraces. They are drawn in their true colours:

no attempt is made to bedeck them with sentimental graces—to hold them up to sympathetic admiration with the maudlin novelist, or to exhibit them as “interesting young females” with the police reporter. They lift not their brazen fronts in courts and palaces; in obscure corners they ply their obscene trade. We know that it is their vocation, and dismiss them from our minds. There is no corruption to be feared from the example of the inmates of Mr. Overdone’s establishment or Mrs. Quickly’s tavern. Shakspeare exhibits only one fallen lady in all his plays—and she is Cressida. But *Troilus and Cressida* deserves a separate paper, if for no other reason, yet because it is a play in which Shakspeare has handled the same characters as Homer. It is worth while to consider in what points these greatest of poets agree, and in what they differ.

Such, then, is the female character as drawn in Shakspeare. It is pure, honourable, spotless,—ever ready to perform a kind action,—never shrinking from a heroic one. Gentle and submissive where duty or affection bids,—firm and undaunted in resisting the approaches of sin, or shame, or disgrace. Constant in love through every trial,—faithful and fond in all the great relations of life, as wife, as daughter, as sister, as

mother, as friend,—witty or refined, tender or romantic, lofty or gay,—her failings shrouded, her good and lovely qualities brought into the brightest light, she appears in the pages of the mighty dramatist as if she were the cherished daughter of a fond father, the idolized mistress of an adoring lover, the very goddess of a kneeling worshipper. I have catalogued most of the female names which adorn the plays. One is absent from the list. She is absent; the dark lady of that stupendous work which, since the Eumenides, bursting upon the stage with appalling howl in quest of the fugitive Orestes, electrified with terror the Athenian audience, has met no equal. I intend to maintain that Lady Macbeth, too, is human in heart and impulse,—that she is not meant to be an embodiment of the Furies.

Macbeth is the gloomiest of the plays. Well may its hero say that he has supped full of horrors. It opens with the incantations of spiteful witches, and concludes with a series of savage combats, stimulated by quenchless hate on one side, and by the desperation inspired by the consciousness of unpardonable crime on the other. In every act we have blood in torrents. The first man who appears on the stage is the *bleeding* captain. The first word uttered by earthly lips is,

“What *bloody* man is that?” The tale which the captain relates is full of fearful gashes, reeking wounds, and *bloody* execution. The murder of Duncan in the second act stains the hands of Macbeth so deeply as to render them fit to incarnadine the multitudinous seas, and make the green—one red. His lady imbrues herself in the crimson stream, and gilds the faces of the sleeping grooms with gore. She thus affords a pretence to the thane for slaughtering them in an access of simulated fury.

“Their hands and faces were all badged with *blood*,
So were their daggers, which unwiped we found
Upon their pillows.”

Macbeth carefully impresses the sanguinary scene upon his hearers :

“Here lay Duncan,
His silver skin laced with his golden *blood*,
And his gashed stabs looked like a breach in nature
For ruin’s wasteful entrance ; there the murderers,
Steeped in the colours of their trade, their daggers
Unmannerly breeched in *gore*.”

Direful thoughts immediately follow, and the sky itself participates in the horror. The old man who can well remember threescore and ten, during which time he had witnessed dreadful hours and strange things, con-

siders all as mere trifles, compared with the sore night of Duncan's murder.

“The heavens,
Thou seest, as troubled with man's act,
Threaten his *bloody* stage ; by the clock 'tis day,
And yet dark night strangles the travelling lamp.”

The horses of Duncan forget their careful training, and their natural instincts, to break their stalls and eat each other. Gloom, ruin, murder, horrible doubts, unnatural suspicions, portents of dread in earth and heaven, surround us on all sides. In the third act, desperate assassins, incensed by the blows and buffets of the world, weary with disasters, tugged with fortune, willing to wreak their hatred on all mankind, and persuaded that Banquo has been their enemy, set upon and slay him, without remorse and without a word. The prayer of their master to Night, that she would, with

“*Bloody* and invisible hand,
Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond ”

which kept him in perpetual terror, is in part accomplished ; and he who was his enemy in, as he says,

“Such *bloody* distance,
That every minute of his being thrusts
Against my life,”

lies breathless in the dust. The murderers bring the witness of their deed to the very banquet-chamber of the expecting king. They come with *blood* upon the face. The hardened stabber does not communicate the tidings of his exploit in set phrase. He minces not the matter,—his language is not culled from any trim and weeded vocabulary; and the king compliments him in return, in language equally vernacular and unrefined.

Mur. My lord, his throat is cut; that I did for him.

Mac. Thou art the best o' the cut-throats."

Cheered by this flattering tribute to his merits, the accomplished artist goes on, in all the pride of his profession, to show that he had left no rubs or botches in his work. Macbeth, after a burst of indignation at the escape of Fleance, recurs to the comfortable assurance of Banquo's death, and asks, in the full certainty of an answer in the affirmative,

"But Banquo's safe?"

Mur. Ay, my good lord: safe in a ditch he bides,
With twenty trenched gashes on his head;
The least a death to nature.

Mac. Thanks for that."

Presently the gory locks of Banquo's spectre attest

the truth of what the murderer has told, and the banquet breaks up by the flight, rather than the retirement, of the astonished guests ; leaving Macbeth dismally, but fiercely, pondering over thoughts steeped in slaughter. The very language of the scene is redolent of blood. The word itself occurs in almost every speech. At the conclusion of the act, come the outspeaking of suspicions hitherto only muttered, and the determination of the Scottish nobles to make an effort which may give to their tables meat, sleep to their eyes, and free their feasts and banquets from those bloody knives, the fatal hue of which haunted them in their very hours of retirement, relaxation, or festival.

The sanguine stain dyes the fourth act as deeply. A head severed from the body, and a bloody child, are the first apparitions that rise before the king at the bidding of the weird sisters. The blood-boltered Banquo is the last to linger upon the stage, and sear the eyes of the amazed tyrant. The sword of the assassin is soon at work in the castle of Macduff; and his wife and children fly from the deadly blow, shrieking "murder"—in vain. And the fifth act,—from its appalling commencement, when the sleeping lady plies her hopeless task of nightly washing the

blood-stained hand, through the continual clangour of trumpets calling, as clamorous harbingers, to blood and death, to its conclusion, when Macduff, with dripping sword, brings in the freshly hewn-off head of the "dead butcher," to lay it at the feet of the victorious Malcolm, — exhibits a sequence of scenes in which deeds and thoughts of horror and violence are perpetually, and almost physically, forced upon the attention of the spectator. In short, the play is one clot of blood from beginning to end. It was objected to Alfieri, (by Grimm, I believe,) that he wrote his tragedies not in tears, but blood. Shakspeare could write in tears when he pleased. In Macbeth he chose to dip his pen in a darker current.

Nowhere in the course of the play does he seek to beguile us of our tears. We feel no more interest in the gracious Duncan, in Banquo, in Lady Macduff, than we do in the slaughtered grooms. We feel that they have been brutally murdered; and, if similar occurrences were to take place in Wapping or Rotherhithe, London would be in commotion. All the police from A to Z would be set on the alert, the newspapers crammed with paragraphs, and a hot search instigated after the murderer. If taken, he would be duly tried, wondered at, gazed after, convicted, hanged and for-

gotten. We should think no more of his victim than we now think of Hannah Browne. The other characters of the play, with the exception of the two principal, are nonentities. We care nothing for Malcolm or Donalbain, or Lenox or Rosse, or the rest of the Scottish nobles. Pathetic, indeed, are the words which burst from Macduff when he hears the astounding tidings that all his pretty chickens and their dam have been carried off at one fell swoop; but he soon shakes the woman out of his eyes, and dreams only of revenge. His companions are slightly affected by the bloody deed, and grief is in a moment converted into rage. It is but a short passage of sorrow, and the only one of the kind. What is equally remarkable is, that we have but one slight piece of comic in the play,—the few sentences given to the porter;* and

* The speech of this porter is in blank verse.

Here is a knocking indeed! If a man
Were porter of hell-gate, he should have old
Turning the key. Knock—knock—knock! Who is there,
In the name of Beelzebub? Here is a farmer
That hanged himself [up] on the expectation
Of plenty: come in time. Have napkins enough
About you. Here you 'll sweat for it. Knock—knock!
Who 's there, in the other devil's name? [I'] faith
Here 's an equivocator, that could swear
In both the scales 'gainst either scale; [one] who

their humour turns upon a gloomy subject for jest,—the occupation of the keeper of the gates of hell. With these two exceptions,—the brief pathos of Macduff, and the equally brief comedy of the porter,—all the rest is blood. Tears and laughter have no place in this cavern of death.

Of such a gory poem, Macbeth is the centre, the moving spirit. From the beginning, before treason has entered his mind, he appears as a man delighting in blood. The captain announcing his deeds against Macdonwald, introduces him bedabbled in slaughter.

Committed treason enough for God's sake, yet
 Cannot equivocate to heaven. Oh! come in,
 Equivocator. Knock—knock—knock! Who's there?
 'Faith, here 's an English tailor come hither
 For stealing out of a French hose. Come in, tailor.
 Here you may roast your goose.

Knock—knock—

Never in quiet.

Who are you? but this place is too cold for hell.
 I'll devil-porter it no longer. I had thought
 T' have let in some of all professions,
 That go the primrose-path to th' everlasting darkness.

The alterations I propose are very slight. *Upon* for *on*, *i' faith* for *'faith*, and the introduction of the word *one* in a place where it is required. The succeeding dialogue is also in blank verse. So is the sleeping scene of Lady Macbeth; and that so palpably, that I wonder it could ever pass for prose.

“For brave Macbeth,—well he deserves that name,—
Disdaining fortune, with his brandished steel,
Which smoked with bloody execution,
Like valour’s minion carved out his passage
Until he faced the slave ;
And ne’er shook hands, nor bade farewell to him,
Till he unseamed him from the nave to the chops,*
And fixed his head upon our battlements.”

After this desperate backstroke, as Warburton justly calls it,* Macbeth engages in another combat equally sanguinary. He and Banquo

“Doubly redoubled strokes upon the foe ;
Except they meant to bathe in reeking wounds,
Or memorize another Golgotha,
I cannot tell.”

Hot from such scenes, he is met by the witches. They promise him the kingdom of Scotland. The glittering prize instantly affects his imagination ; he is so wrapt in thought at the very moment of its announcement that he cannot speak. He soon informs us what is the hue of the visions passing through his mind. The witches

* Warburton proposes that we should read “from the *nape* to the chops,” as a more probable wound. But this could hardly be called *unseaming* ; and the wound is intentionally horrid to suit the character of the play. So, for the same reason, when Duncan is murdered, we are made to remark that the old man had much blood in him.

had told him he was to be king: they had not said a word about the means. He instantly supplies them:

“Why do I yield to that suggestion
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs
Against the use of nature.”

The dreaded word itself soon comes:

“My thought, whose MURDER yet is but fantastical,
Shakes so my single state of man, that function
Is smothered in surmise.”

To a mind so disposed, temptation is unnecessary. The thing was done. Duncan was marked out for murder before the letter was written to Lady Macbeth, and she only followed the thought of her husband.

Love for him is in fact her guiding passion. She sees that he covets the throne,—that his happiness is wrapt up in the hope of being a king,—and her part is accordingly taken without hesitation. With the blindness of affection, she persuades herself that he is full of the milk of human kindness, and that he would reject false and unholy ways of attaining the object of his desire. She deems it, therefore, her duty to spirit him to the task. Fate and metaphysical aid, she argues, have destined him for the golden round of Scotland.

Shall she not lend her assistance? She does not ask the question twice. She will. Her sex, her woman's breasts, her very nature, oppose the task she has prescribed to herself; but she prays to the ministers of murder, to the spirits that tend on mortal thoughts, to make thick her blood, and stop up the access and passage of remorse; and she succeeds in mustering the desperate courage which bears her through. Her instigation was not in reality wanted. Not merely the murder of Duncan, but of Malcolm, was already resolved on by Macbeth.

“ The Prince of Cumberland! That is a step
On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,
For in my way it lies. Stars! hide your fires,
Let not light see my black and dark desires!”

As the time for the performance of the deed approaches, he is harassed by doubts; but he scarcely shows any traces of compunction or remorse. He pauses before the crime,—not from any hesitation at its enormity, but for fear of its results,—for fear of the poisoned chalice being returned to his own lips,—for fear of the trumpet-tongued indignation which must attend the discovery of the murder of so popular a prince as Duncan,—one who has borne his faculties so meekly,

and loaded Macbeth himself with honours. He is not haunted by any feeling for the sin, any compassion for his victim;—the dread of losing the golden opinions he has so lately won, the consequences of failure, alone torment him. His wife has not to suggest murder, for that has been already resolved upon; but to represent the weakness of drawing back, after a resolution has once been formed. She well knows that the momentary qualm will pass off,—that Duncan is to be slain, perhaps when time and place will not so well adhere. Now, she argues,—now it can be done with safety. Macbeth is determined to wade through slaughter to a throne. If he passes this moment he loses the eagerly desired prize, and lives for ever after a coward in his own esteem; or he may make the attempt at a moment when detection is so near at hand, that the stroke which sends Duncan to his fate will be but the prelude of the destruction of my husband. She therefore rouses him to do at once that from which she knows nothing but fear of detection deters him; and, feeling that there are no conscientious scruples to overcome, applies herself to show that the present is the most favourable instant. It is for him she thinks—for him she is unsexed—for his ambition she works—for his safety she provides.

Up to the very murder, Macbeth displays no pity—no feeling for anybody but himself. Fear of detection still haunts him, and no other fear.

“Thou sure and steadfast earth,
Hear not my steps which way they walk, for fear
The very stones prate of my whereabouts.”

As Lady Macbeth says, it is the frustrated attempt, not the crime, that can confound him. When it has been accomplished, he is for a while visited by brain-sick fancies; and to her, who sees the necessity of prompt action, is left the care of providing the measures best calculated to avert the dreaded detection. She makes light of facing the dead, and assures her husband that

“A little water clears us of this deed.
How easy it is then!”

Does she indeed feel this? Are these the real emotions of her mind? Does she think that a little water will wash out what has been done, and that it is as easy to make all trace of it vanish from the heart as from the hand? She shall answer us from her sleep, in the loneliness of midnight, in the secrecy of her chamber. Bold was her bearing, reckless and defying her tongue, when her husband was to be served or saved; but the sigh bursting from her heavily-charged breast, and her deep

agony when she feels that, so far from its being easy to get rid of the witness of murder, no washing can obliterate the damned spot, no perfume sweeten the hand once redolent of blood, prove that the recklessness and defiance were only assumed. We find at last what she had sacrificed, how dreadful was the struggle she had to subdue. Her nerve, her courage, mental and physical, was unbroken during the night of murder; but horror was already seated in her heart. Even then a touch of what was going on in her bosom breaks forth. When urging Macbeth to act, she speaks as if she held the strongest ties of human nature in contempt.

“ I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me :
I would, when it was smiling in my face,
Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dashed the brains out, had I but so sworn
As you have done to this.”

Is she indeed so unnatural—so destitute of maternal, of womanly feeling? No. In the next scene we find her deterred from actual participation in killing Duncan, because he resembled her father in his sleep. This is not the lady to pluck the nipple from the boneless gums of her infant, and dash out its brains. Her language is exaggerated in mere bravado, to taunt Macbeth's in-

firmity of purpose by a comparison with her own boasted firmness ; but if the case had arisen, she who had recoiled from injuring one whose life stood in the way of her husband's hopes from a fancied resemblance to her father, would have seen in the smile of her child a talisman of resistless protection.

The murder done, and her husband on the throne, she is no longer implicated in guilt. She is unhappy in her elevation, and writhes under a troubled spirit in the midst of assumed gaiety. She reflects with a settled melancholy that

“ Nought's had, all's spent,
When our desire is got without content,
'Tis safer to be that which we destroy,
Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy.”

This to herself. To cheer her lord, she speaks a different language in the very next line.

“ How now, my lord ! why do you keep alone,
Of sorriest fancies your companions making ;
Using those thoughts which should indeed have died
With those they think on ? ”

Her own thoughts, we have just seen, were full as sorry as those of her husband ; but she can wear a mask. Twice only does she appear after her accession to the throne ; once masked, once unmasked. Once seated at

high festival, entertaining the nobles of her realm, full of grace and courtesy, performing her stately hospitalities with cheerful countenance, and devising with rare presence of mind excuses for the distracted conduct of her husband. Once again, when all guard is removed, groaning in despair.

The few words she says to Macbeth after the guests have departed, almost driven out by herself, mark that her mind is completely subdued. She remonstrates with him at first for having broken up the feast; but she cannot continue the tone of reproof, when she finds that his thoughts are bent on gloomier objects. Blood is for ever on his tongue. She had ventured to tell him that the visions which startle him, were but the painting of his brain, and that he was unmanned in folly. He takes no heed of what she says, and continues to speculate, at first in distraction, then in dread, and lastly in savage cruelty, upon blood. The apparition of Banquo almost deprives him of his senses. He marvels that such things could be, and complains that a cruel exception to the ordinary laws of nature is permitted in his case. Blood, he says,

“—— has been shed ere now in the olden time,
Ere human statute purged the gentle weal,”—

and in more civilized times also; but, when death came, no further consequences followed. Now not even twenty mortal murders [he remembered the number of deadly gashes reported by the assassin] will keep the victim in his grave. As long as Banquo's ghost remains before him, he speaks in the same distracted strain. When the object of his special wonder, by its vanishing, gives him time to reflect, fear of detection, as usual, is his first feeling.

"It will have blood, they say; blood will have blood!"

The most improbable witnesses have detected murder. Stones, trees, magotpies, choughs, have disclosed the secretest man of blood. Then come cruel resolves, to rid himself of his fears. Mercy or remorse is to be henceforward unknown; the firstlings of his heart are to be the firstlings of his hand,—the bloody thought is to be followed instantly by the bloody deed. The tiger is now fully aroused in his soul.

"I am in blood

Stept in so far, that, should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o'er."

He sees an enemy in every castle; everywhere he plants his spies; from every hand he dreads an attempt upon his life. Nearly two centuries after the play was written, the world beheld one of its fairest

portions delivered to a rule as bloody as that of the Scottish tyrant; and so true to nature are the conceptions of Shakspeare, that the speeches of mixed terror and cruelty, which he has given to Macbeth, might have been uttered by Robespierre. The atrocities of the Jacobin, after he had stept so far in blood, were dictated by fear. "Robespierre," says a quondam satellite,* "devenait plus sombre; son air renfrogné repoussait tout le monde; il ne parlait que d'assassinat, encore d'assassinat, toujours d'assassinat. Il avait peur que son ombre ne l'assassinât."

Lady Macbeth sees this grisly resolution, and ceases to remonstrate or interfere. Her soul is bowed down before his, and he communicates with her no longer. He tells her to be ignorant of what he plans, until she can applaud him for what he has done. When he abruptly asks her,

"How say'st thou,—that Macduff denies his person
At our great bidding?"

she, well knowing that she has not said anything about it, and that the question is suggested by his own fear and suspicion, timidly inquires,

"Have you sent to him, *sir*?"

* *Causes secretes de la Révolution de 9 au 10 Thermidor*; by Vilate, ex-juré révolutionnaire de Paris.

The last word is an emphatic proof that she is wholly subjugated. Too well is she aware of the cause, and the consequence, of Macbeth's *sending* after Macduff; but she ventures not to hint. She is no longer the stern-tongued lady urging on the work of death, and taunting her husband for his hesitation. She now addresses him in the humbled tone of an inferior; we now see fright and astonishment seated on her face. He tells her that she marvels at his words, and she would fain persuade herself that they are but the feverish effusions of an over-wrought mind. Sadly she says,

“ You lack the season of all nature,—sleep.”

Those are the last words we hear from her waking lips; and with a hope that repose may banish those murky thoughts from her husband's mind, she takes, hand in hand with him, her tearful departure from the stage; and seeks her remorse-haunted chamber, there to indulge in useless reveries of deep-rooted sorrow, and to perish by her own hand amid the crashing ruin of her fortunes, and the fall of that throne which she had so fatally contributed to win.

He now consigns himself wholly to the guidance of the weird sisters; and she takes no part in the horrors which desolate Scotland, and rouse against him the

insurrection of the enraged thanes. But she clings to him faithfully in his downfall. All others except the agents of his crimes, and his personal dependents, have abandoned him; but she, with mind diseased, and a heart weighed down by the perilous stuff of recollections that defy the operation of oblivious antidote, follows him to the doomed castle of Dunsinane. It is evident that he returns her affection, by his anxious solicitude about her health, and his melancholy recital of her mental sufferings. He shows it still more clearly by his despairing words when the tidings of her death are announced. Seyton delays to communicate it; but at last the truth must come,—that the queen is dead. It is the over-flowing drop in his cup of misfortune.

“She should have died hereafter;—

There would have been a time for such a word.”

I might have borne it at some other time; but now—now—now that I am deserted by all—penned in my last fortress—feeling that the safeguards in which I trusted are fallacious,—now it is indeed the climax of my calamity, that she, who helped me to rise to what she thought was prosperity and honour,—who clung to me through a career that inspired all else with horror and hate,—and who, in sickness of body, and agony of

mind, follows me in the very desperation of my fate, should at such an hour be taken from me,—I am now undone indeed. He then, for the first time, reflects on the brief and uncertain tenure of life. He has long dabbled in death, but it never before touched him so closely. He is now aweary of the sun—now finds the deep curses which follow him sufficiently loud to pierce his ear,—now discovers that he has already lived long enough,—and plunges into the combat, determined, if he has lived the life of a tyrant, to die the death of a soldier, with harness on his back. Surrender or suicide does not enter his mind; with his habitual love of bloodshed, he feels a savage pleasure in dealing gashes all around; and at last, when he finds the charms on which he depended, of no avail, flings himself, after a slight hesitation, into headlong conflict with the man by whose sword he knows he is destined to fall, with all the reckless fury of despair. What has he now to care for? The last tie that bound him to human kind was broken by the death of his wife, and it was time that his tale of sound and fury should come to its appropriate close.

Thus fell he whom Malcolm in the last speech of the play calls “the dead butcher.” By the same tongue Lady Macbeth is stigmatized as the fiend-like queen.

Except her share in the murder of Duncan,—which is, however, quite sufficient to justify the epithet in the mouth of his son,—she does nothing in the play to deserve the title; and for her crime she has been sufficiently punished by a life of disaster and remorse. She is not the tempter of Macbeth. It does not require much philosophy to pronounce that there were no such beings as the weird sisters; or that the voice that told the Thane of Glamis that he was to be King of Scotland, was that of his own ambition. In his own bosom was brewed the hell-broth, potent to call up visions counselling tyranny and blood; and its ingredients were his own evil passions and criminal hopes. Macbeth himself only believes as much of the predictions of the witches as he desires. The same prophets, who foretold his elevation to the throne, foretold also that the progeny of Banquo would reign; and yet, after the completion of the prophecy so far as he is himself concerned, he endeavours to mar the other part by the murder of Fleance. The weird sisters are to him, no more than the Evil Spirit which, in Faust, tortures Margaret at her prayers. They are but the personified suggestions of his mind. She, the wife of his bosom, knows the direction of his thoughts; and, bound to him in love, exerts every energy, and sacri-

fices every feeling, to minister to his hopes and aspirations. This is her sin, and no more. He retains, in all his guilt and crime, a fond feeling for his wife. Even when meditating slaughter, and dreaming of blood, he addresses soft words of conjugal endearment; he calls her "dearest chuck," while devising assassinations, with the fore-knowledge of which he is unwilling to sully her mind. Selfish in ambition, selfish in fear, his character presents no point of attraction but this one merit. Shakspeare gives us no hint as to her personal charms, except when he makes her describe her hand as "little." We may be sure that there were few "more thoroughbred or fairer fingers," in the land of Scotland than those of its queen, whose bearing in public towards Duncan, Banquo, and the nobles, is marked by elegance and majesty; and, in private, by affectionate anxiety for her sanguinary lord. He duly appreciated her feelings, but it is pity that such a woman should have been united to such a man. If she had been less strong of purpose, less worthy of confidence, he would not have disclosed to her his ambitious designs, less resolute and prompt of thought and action, she would not have been called on to share his guilt; less sensitive or more hardened she would not have suffered it to prey for ever like a vulture upon her heart.

She affords, as I consider it, only another instance of what women will be brought to, by a love which listens to no considerations, which disregards all else beside, when the interests, the wishes, the happiness, the honour, or even the passions, caprices, and failings of the beloved object are concerned; and if the world, in a compassionate mood, will gently scan the softer errors of sister-woman, may we not claim a kindly construing for the motives which plunged into the Aceldama of this blood-washed tragedy the sorely urged and broken-hearted Lady Macbeth?

TIMON OF ATHENS.

THE story of Timon, the Misanthrope was popular not only in his native land of Greece, but in the English literature of the Middle Ages. Classical readers, who are of course acquainted with the lively dialogue of Lucian, were once apt to look upon the philosopher of Samosata as affording the original of the play of Shakspeare; but I doubt if Lucian, though familiar to the learned, was popularly known even at the end of the sixteenth century in England. Shakspeare was indebted for the hint, and the principal

incidents of his drama, to Plutarch, translated from the French of Amyot by Sir Thomas North, and to *Painter's Palace of Pleasure*. Dr. Farmer, in his very shallow and pretending *Essay on the Learning of Shakspeare*, announces this important fact among others equally important, with much flourish; and those who feel inclined for such inquiries, will find sufficient to satisfy their curiosity in the voluminous notes gathered by the industry of Malone, Steevens, and Boswell.

To use the phrase of Dr. Farmer, which immediately succeeds his notice of *Timon*, "were this a proper place for such a disquisition," I should have something to say, not merely on the learning of Shakspeare,—a point on which I differ exceedingly with the Master of Emanuel,—but on the utility of learning to a dramatist. I should be prepared to contend, that though the greater the store of knowledge, no matter whence derived,—from books, from observation, from reflection,—possessed by a writer on any subject, and the larger the field whence an author of works of imagination can cull or compare, so much more copious will be his sources of thought, illustration, ornament, and allusions; yet that the dramatist, and indeed the poet in general, (the exceptions are few, and easily accounted for,) should not travel far out of the ordi-

nary and beaten path for the main staple and material of his poem. Without immediately referring to the question of classical learning, many reasons exist for thinking that Richard the Third was not so deformed either in mind or body as he is represented in the two plays in which he appears in Shakspeare, or in the single one into which they are both clumsily rolled for the stage; but popular opinion, and the ordinary chronicles of the times, so represented him. Northern antiquaries are generally of opinion that Macbeth was the true king, and that the blood-stained mantle of cruelty and oppression ought to be shifted to the shoulders of the "gracious Duncan," who was in reality the usurper. In like manner we can conceive that if the authorities of Saxo-Grammaticus or Geoffry of Monmouth could be hunted up, a different colouring might be given to the tales of Hamlet or Lear. But what is all this to the purpose? It is no part of the duty of the dramatist to invade the province of the antiquary or the critic; and yet, for confining himself to his proper department, he incurs the censure of Farmer, and other persons of the same calibre of intellect. If Shakspeare had had all the concentrated knowledge of all the antiquarian societies of Denmark, Scotland, Norway, or Wales, he would have completely

forgotten, what it was utterly impossible *he* should forget,—the first principles of dramatic art, if he depicted Macbeth, Lear, or Hamlet in any other manner than that which he has chosen. He would not have taken the trouble, even if editions of Saxo-Grammaticus or Hector Boethius were as plenty as blackberries, to turn over a single page of their folios. He found all that his art wanted in the historians or romance-writers of the day,—in Hall or Holinshed, or the *Tragical History of Hamblet*, and that, too, translated, not from the Latin of the Danish annalist, but from the French of the story-teller Belleforest. Common sense would dictate this course; but if the learned languages be wanted to support it, I may quote Horace, who, being eminently the poet of common sense, speaks for all times and countries.

“Rectius Iliacum carmen deducis in actus,
Quàm si proferres ignota indictaque primus.”

Take the tale or the legend as it is popularly believed for the foundation of your drama, and leave to others the obscure glory of hunting after new lights, or unheard-of adventures.

In his classical plots the same principle holds. In his *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Julius Cæsar*, *Coriolanus*,

and *Timon of Athens*, "it is notorious," to use the words of Dr. Farmer, "that much of his *matter-of-fact* knowledge is deduced from Plutarch; but in what language he read him, hath yet been the question." A more idle question could not have been asked. He might, for anything we know to the contrary, have *read* him in Greek; but for dramatic purposes he *used* him in English. Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch was a remarkably popular book; and Shakspeare, writing not for verbal critics, anxiously collating the version with the original, and on the look-out to catch slips of the pen or mistakes of the press,* but

* Such as *Lydia* for *Libya*, in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Act iii. Sc. 6.

"——— made her
Of Lower Syria, Cyprus, *Lydia*,
Absolute queen."

Upton, correcting it from the text of Plutarch, substituted *Libya*; and Dr. Johnson and other commentators adopted the correction. Farmer had the great merit of discovering that the word is *Lydia* in North, whom Shakspeare followed. It was a great shame indeed that he had not noticed the error, and collated the English with the Greek! In the same spirit of sagacious criticism it is remarked, that Cæsar is made to leave to the Roman people his gardens, &c. "on *this* side Tiber," whereas it should be "on *that* side Tiber,"—the original being *ωέραν τοῦ ποταμοῦ*. North translates it, however, "on *this* side," and Shakspeare again follows him without turning to the Greek. Farmer, with an old rhetorical

for the ordinary frequenters of the theatre, consulted the volume of the English knight, not that of the Boeotian biographer. If he had been as learned as Isaac Casaubon, he would have acted precisely in the same manner. The minute and unceasing study of

artifice, says, "I could furnish you with many more instances, but these are as good as a thousand." He had given *three*—and I extremely doubt if he could have given three more. He bids us "turn to the translation from the French of Amyot, by Thomas North, in folio, 1579, and you will at once see the *origin* of the mistake." It is hard to say in what sense Farmer uses the word "origin;" but the mistakes originate in Amyot, who translates the former passage "Royne d'Egypte, de Cypre, de *Lydie*," and the latter "et qu'il laissoit au peuple des jardins et vergers *deça* la rivière du Tybre." I agree with Farmer, however, in thinking that, if he could adduce the thousand instances of which he speaks, his argument would be nothing the better. It would only prove that Shakspeare, for the purposes of his plays, consulted North in English, and not Plutarch in Greek; a fact which may be readily conceded, and, as I have said in the text, completely justified on the true principles of the drama.

I do not agree with Upton and others in their proposed alteration of these two passages, which, however they may differ from the text of Plutarch, I would suffer to remain as they appear in the folio, because I am sure that Shakspeare so wrote them. Of the third, referred to by Dr. Farmer, I am not so clear. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Act iv. Sc. 1. Augustus, in reply to Antony's challenge, says:

"Let the old ruffian know
I have many other ways to die—meantime,
Laugh at his challenge."

classical literature since the days of Shakspeare has banished blunders from our editions and translations, and not even the most carelessly educated would deem

“What a reply is this!” says Upton: “it is acknowledging he should fall under the unequal combat. But if we read,

Let the old ruffian know
He hath many other ways to die: meantime,
 I laugh at his challenge.

we have the poignancy and the very repartee of Cæsar in Plutarch.” To this reading, which has been generally adopted, Dr. Farmer objects that, though it is certainly so in the Greek and the modern translation, “Shakspeare was misled by the ambiguity of the old one.” Antonius sent again to challenge Cæsar to fight him, to which Cæsar answered, “That *he* had many other ways to die.” The doctor ought to have told us that the ambiguity here proceeded from Amyot; “Cesar luy fit reponse, qu’il avoit beaucoup d’autres moyens de mourir que celui-là;” but it is not an ambiguity of a very puzzling kind. It appears to me that Shakspeare would have followed his text literally as usual, and borrowed the word “*he*.” I am, therefore, in favour of Upton’s reading; especially as it mends the metre, which in the present text is somewhat out of joint.

“Cæsar to Antony. Let the old ruffian know
 I have many other ways to die—meantime,
 Laugh at his challenge.

Mæc. Cæsar must think,” &c.

The proposed reading would make it much smoother.

“Cæsar to Antony. Let the old ruffian
 Know he hath many other ways to die:
 Meantime, I laugh at ’s challenge.

Mæc. Cæsar must think,” &c.

it pedantic or misplaced in a dramatist to write with a constant reference to the original, no matter in what language, from which he drew his story ; but, on the other hand, we should deem him a very dull critic indeed who would insist upon it that in a play avowedly written after Hooke, or Gibbon, or Mitford, its author should verify every quotation, and take care that their authorities were given with all the perfections of the last “*editio aliis longè locupletior.*”

Ben Jonson took another course, and his success was as indifferent as that of Shakspeare was overwhelming. His *Sejanus* and *Catiline* are treasures of learning. Gifford truly says of the latter, that “the number of writers whom Jonson has consulted, and the industry and care with which he has extracted from them every circumstance conducive to the elucidation of his plot, can only be conceived by those who have occasion to search after his authorities. He has availed himself of almost every scattered hint from the age of Sallust to that of Elizabeth for the correct formation of his characters, and placed them before our eyes as they appear in the writings of those who lived and acted with them.” The consequence is, that *Catiline* is absolutely unbearable on the stage, and fails to please in the closet, because the knowledge with which it abounds is con-

veyed in an inappropriate form. If Jonson had bestowed the same pains, and expended the same learning, upon a history of the Catilinarian conspiracy, he might have produced a historical treatise to be applauded, instead of a tragedy to be at most but tolerated. His learning oppressed him. He was too full of knowledge to borrow his plots, not to say from North, but from Plutarch himself. The inaccuracies of the old story-teller would have constantly shocked his scholar-like mind; and, instead of drawing characters or inventing situations, he would have been in perpetual quest of authorities to corroborate or contradict his principal text. Had there been any such thing as a Plutarchian life of Catiline, or “a Tragical History of the bloody conspiracy of Rome, showing how they swore upon a bowl of blood to burn the town, and murder the senators; with the particulars of the execution of some of the conspirators, and the killing of the rest in a bloody battle near unto the Italian mountains called the Alpes,” the subject might have attracted the attention of Shakspeare, who would have assuredly looked no farther. The gossiping biographer or the prating ballad-monger would suffice for his purpose; and all other authors, from the age of Sallust to that of Elizabeth, might rest unconsulted in peace. We should, however, have had characters which,

if they were not as correctly formed, “and placed before our eyes as they appear in the *writings* of those who lived and acted with them,” would have been placed before us as they appeared in the eyes of men themselves who saw them live and act. He would not have dressed up the dry-bones of history, skeleton-fashion ; but clothed them with flesh, and sent upon the stage, not critical abstractions, but actual men. It is usual to talk of the art of Jonson as something opposed to the genius of Shakspeare. With deference to those who employ this language, it is not over-wise. In everything material the possession of genius includes the possession of art ; and in their common pursuit it would be easy to prove that Jonson was as much inferior in dramatic art, as it is admitted he was in dramatic genius, to his illustrious contemporary. I am much mistaken if I could not support my opinion by the authority of no less a person than Aristotle himself, of whom Jonson thought so highly as to write a commentary on his *Poetics*. I do not say this out of any disparagement of that great writer, whose name, on many accounts, stands eminently high for erudition and genius in our own, as it would in any other literature, and whose memory was shamefully used by some of the Shakspearian commentators of the last century ; but I refer to him because the

acknowledged failure of his learned dramas affords, in my mind, a full justification of the course pursued by Shakspeare, and ought to put an end to the idle gabble as to the learning of him whom Dr. Farmer so complacently calls "the old bard." But the full discussion of this question, with the numberless incidental disquisitions to which it must give rise, would occupy too large a space to be ventured upon in these fleeting essays; and might make the readers of *Bentley's Miscellany* set me down, if its editor were rash enough to inflict such toil upon them, as a bore of the first magnitude for intruding my dry criticisms upon his pleasant and festive pages. I am rather afraid that they are something inclined to think me so already, and am unwilling farther to jeopardy my reputation on that score. I must confine myself to Timon.

Lucian introduces Timon after his fall from riches, besieging Jupiter with a storm of epithets, and railing at the dotage into which the god has fallen, and his imbecility in permitting so much evil in the world. He reminds him of the former times, in which his lightning and thunder were in constant occupation; when his ægis was perpetually shaken, his bolts darted like clouds of arrows, his hail rattled down as through a sieve; and how once on a great occasion he drowned the world in

an universal deluge, leaving but a spark of life behind in a cock-boat stranded upon Lycorea for the propagation of greater wickedness. After some general reflections, he comes to his own particular case, and upbraids the god for allowing him to be treated with so much ingratitude, especially as he had so often sacrificed at the jovial festivals with so much liberality. His clamours succeed in arresting the attention of Jupiter, who had been scared away for some time from looking into Athens by the noisy disputes of the philosophers ; and, recognizing his claims on divine attention, he despatches Mercury to find Plutus, and bring him to Timon in the desert. The messenger of the gods willingly undertakes the commission ; and a pleasant dialogue between him and Plutus, on the difficulty of keeping or retaining wealth, the difference its possession and its want makes in the human character, and other similar topics, ensues. Plutus is soon introduced to Timon, drives away Poverty, and defends himself against the accusations of the misanthrope, by referring to his own reckless extravagance, and want of discrimination in the choice of associates. Recommending Timon to dig vigorously, he departs. The digging is abundantly successful. It turns up gold in countless quantities, and presently arrive troops of flatterers, allured by the mere smell of

the metal. Some who had treated him with remarkable ingratitude are among the number, and Timon resolves on vengeance. As one by one they approach,—some under pretence that their visits were paid for the sake of doing him service, others promising him public honours and dignities,—he assaults them with his spade, and sends them home battered and broken-headed. At last the visitors become too numerous for this close combat; and determined, like the old man in the story, to try what virtue is in stones, he commences a battery upon them, which soon compels them to retreat, but “not,” as Timon says in the concluding sentence of the dialogue, “bloodless or unwounded.”

Such is a hasty sketch of what is generally looked upon to be one of the most finished compositions of Lucian. The style throughout is gay and airy, (though somewhat hampered by its mythology, for Plutus is made to bear the incompatible characters of the God of Gold, and of gold itself, which every now and then comes in awkwardly,) and the characters are pleasantly sketched. But Lucian nowhere reaches the height of the comic; and over tragic or pathetic, or satire, in its loftier range, he has scarcely any power. The objects of his ridicule are comprised within a small compass. His readers may well exclaim with Lord Byron, “Oh!

thou eternal Homer !” for he can scarcely write two pages without some jeering reference to the Iliad or Odyssey, the spirit of which divine poems he did not in the slightest degree comprehend. The wranglings of the sophists among whom he lived, and to which he attached a wonderful importance, form another topic of which he is never tired. Sketches of Athenian manners and society abound, often graphic, but perpetually filled with complaints of the insolence and upstart pride of the rich. He is always on the watch to remind them of the transitory nature of their possessions ; and to condemn them to insult and disgrace at the hands of the poorer classes, whom they had treated with *hauteur* during life, when they descend to another world. He repeats in several places the comparison of life to a theatrical procession, in which magnificent parts are assigned to some, who pass before the eyes of the spectators clothed in costly garments, and bedecked with glittering jewels ; but, the moment the show is over, are reduced to their original nothingness, no longer kings and heroes, but poor players whose hour has been strutted out. It gives him wonderful pleasure to call Croesus, and Midas, and the other generous princes of old times on the Asiatic coast, whose names are everlastingly hacked to pieces in the common-place satires, or squibs, or homilies of

the Greeks, wretches and offscourings; and to exhibit Cyrus, Darius, or Xerxes, occupied in degrading tasks in the infernal regions. These topics, with perpetual sneers at the then tumbling mythology of Paganism, almost exclusively occupy the pages of Lucian.

His vein of satire was small, and its direction not elevated. It is easy to see that petty feelings of personal spite or envy are at the bottom of all he writes. He was jealous of the attention paid to wealth, and anxious to show the world its mistake in not bestowing exclusive homage on those far superior persons who could write witty dialogue, sparkling *persiflage*, or smart reviews. In the sketch which is called his Life, he lets us into the secret. His father was anxious to make him a sculptor, and apprenticed him to an uncle, who had obtained some reputation as an artist. His uncle treated him harshly, and he took a dislike to the business. He then tells us of his dream, in which the Goddesses of Art and Eloquence contended for him; and, after hearing the pleadings of both, he decided for the latter. The argument which weighed most with him, was, the power conferred by a successful career on a public orator of assuming the port and insolence of the great. I doubt not that Lucian in his prosperous circumstances—it is said that he died Procurator. *i.e.*

Lord Lieutenant, of Egypt—was fully as arrogant, and as sensible of all the privileges of his position, as the most swelling and presumptuous of those whom he belabours in his Dialogues. Swift said that he wrote for no other reason than that he might be treated as if he were a lord; Lucian's ambition for literary renown was stimulated by the hope that he might treat others in what he conceived to be lordly fashion. In other respects the game he pursues is, in general, small. Living in the pestilential atmosphere of a literary town, he thought the squabbling and quibbling of the pædagogues by whom he was surrounded things of vital moment. It was, in his eyes, matter well worthy of all the satirical powers he possessed, to quiz the slovenly dress, or the quack pretensions, of a set of poor devils whose very names must have been unknown beyond the narrow precincts in which they bustled. Greece, in his days, could not boast of any productions of genius; the commentating and criticising age had come; and the classics of bygone times were the subject of everlasting chatter among sects of reviewers anxious to show off their own wit and cleverness. The country had for ages ceased to take any interest in politics; and nothing remained to console national vanity but perpetual declamations on Marathon and Salamis, and

vapourings about their skirmishing and buccaneering wars against the Persians. Philip, and his "god-like son," were, for many reasons which I need not stop to recapitulate, no favourites with the scribbling tribes of fallen Greece, and in general they make their appearance only for some such silly purpose as

"To point a moral, and adorn a tale."

Of the events which occurred in the four or five centuries which elapsed from the death of Alexander to the days of Lucian, no notice is taken. We have scarcely a hint, except in one or two essays of dubious authenticity, of the existence and progress of Christianity, which was with relentless hand knocking to pieces those gods who were so often made the butts of Lucian's ineffective jesting. If there remained to us nothing but his writings, we should be ignorant almost of the existence of the great Roman empire under which he lived. His vision is confined to the gossip of Athens; what he sees there, he depicts with a pleasant and faithful hand; his world is that of sophists and reviewers, and on their concerns he is shrewd, witty, and instructive. Nothing in its style can be better, for example, than the Cobbler and the Cock; but the manners there depicted, and the foibles satirized, are trifling. The Art of writing

History is a perfect model of a review; but then it is no more than a review. The Auction of Slaves is a capital squib; but nothing more than a squib. He has often been compared to Rabelais, who has sometimes borrowed largely from him; (Epistemon's account of what he saw in the other world, for example, is taken not only in conception, but in many of its details, from the Necyomantia of Lucian;) but those who know how to read the Gargantua and Pantagruel in the manner recommended by Rabelais himself in his address to the "*beuveurs trez illustres*," and the others to whom he dedicates his writings, will appreciate the deep difference between a light and sparkling wit, amusing himself with offhand pleasantries on literary folly or provincial absurdity, and the long-pondering old man filled with omnigenous knowledge, rioting in bitter-souled buffoonery over all that can affect the interests or agitate the passions of mankind. Compare Lucian's True History, with the Voyage of Panurge in quest of the Holy Bottle. The Greek has the merit of the original idea, which has since suggested all other imaginary voyages, and supplied no few materials to Gulliver himself, and a pleasant history it must indeed be allowed to be; but what is it after all, but a quiz or parody (often an unfair one) on Herodotus and Homer? In the other, literature and

its concerns hold but a trifling place ; but as the vessel steered by Xenomanes, glides onward through allegoric lands, and prodigious adventures, to its final destination, it leaves untouched no coast where matter is to be found for reflections on law, religion, medicine, science, politics, philosophy, in all their ramifications, poured forth from a bosom filled with unbounded erudition, and a heart perfectly fearless of those to whom it could trace superstition, imposture, quackery, or corruption.

I have dwelt perhaps too long—certainly longer than I had intended—on Lucian ; but I wish to point out the inutility of looking to him, even if he had been at Shakspeare's elbow, as supplying in any degree elements for the character of the dramatic Timon of Athens. *He* is the more energetic misanthrope. *He* indeed *hates* mankind. The Greek is not in earnest. In the depth of his indignation he turns away to jest upon some trifle of manners. He can recollect the ill-breeding and gluttony of the philosopher who licks up the rich sauce off the plate with his fingers ; and he can stop to bandy jests with the hungry parasite, or the venal orator. His opening address to Jupiter, commences with a frolic recapitulation of the epithets addressed to the Olympian ruler by the poets ; and the misanthrope is so far forgotten in the litterateur, that he pauses

before entering on his own calamities and wrongs, to laugh at the brain-stricken poets who are obliged to stop the gap of a yawning rhythm, or to prop up a halting metre, by an epithet. This misanthropy did not very seriously affect the patient ; nor are the evils of which he complains, amounting as they do to little more than his being cut by his old acquaintances now that he is poor, so dreadful or extraordinary as to make him

“————— bid the thunder-bearer shoot,
Or tell tales of them to high-judging Jove.”

The wrath of the Timon of Shakspeare is conceived in a different spirit. No jesting escapes his lips while he hurls his hatred on Athens. His withering malediction touches all the points on which we are most sensitive ; many, from the mere consideration of which we instinctively turn away. He prays for the incontinence of matrons, the disobedience of children, the degradation of nobles before slaves and fools, the foul desecration of virgins beneath the eyes of their parents, the bursting of all social bonds, the preternatural cruelty of boyhood to age:

“ Son of sixteen,
Pluck the lined crutch from thy old limping sire,
And beat his brains out ! ”

The utter uprooting of all the civilized institutions, all the charitable feelings, all the honourable or holy thoughts that link mankind together :

“Piety and fear,
Religion to the gods, peace, justice, truth,
Domestic awe, night-rest, and neighbourhood,
Instruction, manners, mysteries and trades,
Degrees, observances, customs and laws,
Decline to your confounding contraries,
And yet confusion live.”

• This is no mock hatred ; it is the harrowing language of a man thoroughly aroused to indignation, and desperate against his kind. Compare it with the parallel passage of Lucian, and we shall see, without recurring to any such foolish inquiry as to what was the precise quantity of the “less Greek” allowed to Shakspeare by Ben Jonson, that to no other source than that which supplied the maledictions of Lear, or Constance, or Margaret, need we look for the bursting imprecations of Timon.

He is introduced, at the commencement of the play, surrounded with all the pomp and circumstance of profuse wealth. The poet, the painter, the jeweller, await his appearance with the tributes of the pen, the pencil, and the mine. The noblest men of his city bow before

him, cap in hand; the humble look up to him as their surest stay in distress, and none depart disappointed. All conditions and all minds, the poet says in the florid style,

“As well of glib and slippery creatures* as
Of grave and austere quality, tender down
Their service to Lord Timon. His large fortune,
Upon his good and gracious nature hanging,
Subdues and properties to his love and tendance
All sorts of hearts; yea, from the glass-faced flatterer,
To Apemantus, that few things loves better
Than to abhor himself.”

His first appearance on the stage is to release a prisoner by paying the debt; to give the dowry required to make two lovers happy in their union; to bestow lavish recompense, and, what is fully as dear to the ear of painter or poet, commendations equally lavish on the productions offered to his patronage; to receive with abounding hospitality Alcibiades and his train; to preside at a magnificent banquet, heaping his guests with gifts, and entertaining them with all the splendour that taste and prodigal expense can command. His own heart, proud and gratified, swells with a strong desire to do still more:

* Should not this be “creature,” *i. e.* creation?

“Methinks I could deal kingdoms to my friends,
And ne’er be weary.”

He is happy in being the instrument of contributing to the happiness of others. It is his delight---his pleasure---his hobby. Not to be generous, is not to be himself. His profuse and liberal habit blinds him to all suspicions that the rest of the world is not of the same temper. The time comes when he is to be cruelly undeceived, and when his sincerity in these professions of universal love and benevolence is to be severely tested. His wealth, which he thought inexhaustible, has taken to itself wings and fled. But even this does not make any very deep impression upon him. He listens with characteristic impatience to the tale of his ruin told by the disconsolate Flavius. He answers in brief and hasty sentences, and soon bids him “sermon no further.” He has his own resources left, his own plans to fall back upon. He remembers his wish when in the height of imagined prosperity ; he had often desired to be poorer, in order that he might come nearer his friends. He had been affected even to tears when, with overflowing heart, he thought of the precious comfort of having so many persons knit together so closely, that, like brothers, they commanded each other’s fortunes. He reflects with a

justifiable pride, that his generosity was not directed to unworthy purposes, or called forth by unworthy feelings :

“ No villanous bounty yet hath past my heart ;
Unwisely, not ignobly have I given.”

He will not listen to the suggestions of his steward that he can find any difficulty in borrowing. Even when he learns that the senators, on whom he had public claims, and from whom he expected a large sum of money for the mere asking, have turned a deaf ear to applications made in his name, he is not discouraged. He utters a slight expression of spleen, “ You gods reward them !” and at once bidding Flavius look cheerly, proceeds to account for their ingratitude as an exception to the general rule, arising from the lack of kindly warmth in cold-blooded age. Elsewhere he is secure of success :

“————— Ne'er speak or think
That Timon's fortunes 'mong his friends can sink.”

All these hopes are dashed to the ground in a moment. His attempts at borrowing are worse than unsuccessful ; they make his difficulties notorious, and, instead of assisting his wants, cause his house to be besieged with clamorous creditors. Shakspeare has not written

the scene in which the ungrateful refusals of his friends are communicated to him ; but he shows us the effect of the communication on Timon's mind. It strikes him with instant sickness. "Take it on my soul," says his servant Servilius,

"My lord leans wondrously to discontent.
His comfortable temper has forsook him ;
He is much out of health, and keeps his chamber."

This is the cold fit of the ague by which he is smitten. The hot fit of fever is soon at hand. He bursts in controlless rage through the files of opposing duns ; plans a whimsical, but a decisive revenge ; and having executed it, parts from the crowd of

"Smiling, smooth, detested parasites,
Courteous destroyers, affable wolves, meek bears,
The fools of fortune, trencher-friends, time-flies,
Cap-and-knee slaves, vapours, and minute-jacks,"

whose prodigious ingratitude had driven him almost mad, with a stern resolution never more to expose himself to similar causes of grief and indignation, by herding again with mankind.

It is useless to say that such a determination was unjust. He who affects to be a misanthrope, is a pitiful and troublesome coxcomb ; real misanthropy is madness, and in the concluding acts of the play,

Timon is actually insane. He had no friends. His money and his dinners attracted dependents and guests in abundance; but he ought to have known that they went *for* the money and the dinner, and nothing else. The entertainer and the entertained were on a level. If they had the pleasure of receiving, he had the glory of giving, and neither party had a right to complain. The course of life he led, was calculated expressly to drive from him all who were possessed of qualities capable of inspiring respect and friendship. No honourable or high-minded man would frequent the house of Timon, to be exposed to the suspicion of going there with sordid or selfish views. He gathered around him throngs of people whom he corrupted into sycophancy, and he is unreasonable enough to complain of the very meanness which was chiefly of his own creation or encouragement. He set no value on what he flung away with lavish hand, and in reality cared as little for those to whom he flung it. While dispensing his boundless hospitalities, or scattering his magnificent gifts, he had in him, though undeveloped, and even by himself unsuspected, the seeds of misanthropy as deeply set as when he was howling against

“All feasts, societies, and throngs of men,”

in the desert. He consulted merely his own whim in giving. He thought that no profusion could exhaust his wealth; and he therefore was profuse, as he imagined, in security. If we held the purse of Fortunatus, or could chain

“Volatile Hermes, and call up unbound,
In various forms, old Proteus from the sea,
Drawn through a limbeck to his native form,”

and achieve the discovery of the philosopher's stone, where would be our merit in dispensing gold all around? We give nothing when we give that which costs us nothing. We do not see that Timon makes any sacrifice, or puts himself to any inconvenience; and we must esteem but lightly that liberality which looks forward to recompense or return. In his prosperity he cherished chance companions without consideration; and with equal want of consideration, he curses all mankind in his adversity. The difference between his feelings in the two cases amounts to no more than this, that Timon, rich, quietly showed his contempt of the ill-chosen circle of parasites with which he had surrounded himself, by a careless bounty showered without distinction on the base as on the worthy; and Timon, poor, clamorously exhibited his hatred of all mankind, hastily judging

them by the wretched sample with which he had associated, in a strain of general imprecation as reckless and indiscriminating.

A servile or sensual mind would have adopted the plan of Gnatho in the *Eunuchus*, who, after he had wasted in "riotous living" whatever property he possessed,—after *patria abligurierat bona*,—seized on such a gull as Thraso, and have endeavoured to live upon others, as others had lived upon him. A good-natured or thoughtless fellow would have tried to mend his luck, called for fresh cards, and begun again. He, no doubt, would be at first especially annoyed by the loss of his money, and still more by the reflection that he had been choused and ill-treated by those whom he took to be his friends, and who, at all events, were the partners of his gayer hours. But the fit would soon pass, the bile would be got rid of, and (if of English tongue) after a few of those national prayers which have obtained us a celebrated *sobriquet* among all the other people of the earth, liberally distributed to all and sundry, he would regain his temper, and philosophically sing

Why should we quarrel for riches,
Or other such glittering toys?
A light heart and a thin pair of breeches
Will go through the world, my brave boys !

He would struggle on, and puzzle it out in one way or another; and, if Fortune smiled once more, be as ready as ever to commence the old game, forgetting and forgiving everything and everybody, and as open as before to be imposed upon by those who gave themselves the trouble to do so.

But Timon could not adopt either of these courses. Too high-bred, too haughty of thought, he could never have descended to be a trencher-slave: too selfishly awake to his own importance, he could never have pardoned those who had hurt his pride, or mortified his vanity.

Such contrasts as these, Shakspeare had no notion of opposing to him. But he has chosen the appropriate contrast in Apemantus, the snarling philosopher,* who is modelled after the cynics, particularly after Diogenes. In Timon's prosperity, he haunts his entertainments for the purpose of indulging his impertinent humour of carping at the company he meets there. Like Diogenes himself, he is no more than an ill-mannered hound, who

* He is thus introduced at Timon's banquet. "Then comes, dropping after all, Apemantus discontentedly, *like himself*." There has been some deep criticism on these words; but, as they do not convey any very brilliant meaning, I incline to think the direction was, "Then comes, dropping after all, Apemantus discontentedly, *by himself*."

deserves perpetual kickings, and is tolerated only for his wit. It is a character easy to assume and to support, requiring nothing more than a sufficient stock of cool impudence and effrontery. Vanity is at the bottom. A desire to brazen out the inconveniences of low breeding and awkward manners, and a love of notoriety, no matter how obtained, are enough to make a cynic. The well-known repartees of Plato and Aristippus set the character of Diogenes in its true light: we may be certain that Alexander, in their celebrated dialogue, looked upon him merely as a buffoon, tumbling about for his diversion in a peculiar fashion; but he was undoubtedly possessed of much wit and humour. The jesting of Apemantus, is as plain-spoken and ill-natured, if not as good, as that of the famed tenant of the tub; and Timon keeps him at his table as an original—a sort of lion, who is as much a part of the diversion of the evening, as the masque of the Amazons, or the lofty strain of the hautboys. There are some touches of nature in the fellow, however; for he sees with regret the approaching downfall of his liberal host, and warns him against the consequences of the course he is pursuing, with a grumbling kindness.

His cynicism is not misanthropy; it is of the same stamp as that of the hero of a celebrated play, which

its celebrated author intended as an exhibition of the feelings and propensities of a man-hater, and gave it accordingly the name of *Le Misanthrope*. It would be absurd to offer eulogies to Molière, but it is undeniable that he has made a mistake in the title of his play. Alceste is a testy and fretful man; nothing more. There is none of the insane rage, and consequently none of the poetry, of the misanthrope about him. It is hard to say what puts him out of humour; and, indeed, he can hardly tell the reason, except that

“Moi, je veux me fâcher, et ne veux point entendre.”

When he comes to matters more specific, we find him repeating the complaints, almost the phrases, of Ape-mantus :

“Non : je ne puis souffrir cette lâche méthode
Qu’affectent la plupart de vos gens à-la-mode ;
Et je ne hay rien tant que les contorsions
De tous ces grands faiseurs de protestations :”

or again,

“Mes yeux sont trop blessés ; et la cour et la ville
Ne m’offrant rien qu’objets à m’échauffer la bile,
J’entre en une humeur noire, en un chagrin profond,
Quand je vois vivre entre eux les hommes comme ils font.
Je ne trouve par-tout que lâche flatterie,
Qu’injustice, intérêt, trahison, fourberie ;

Je ne puis plus tenir, j'enrage, et mon dessein
Est de rompre en visière à tout le genre humain."

It was hardly worth while to come to so desperate a determination for so small a cause. His friend Philinte may well say

"Je ne vois pas, moi, que le cas soit pendable."

Even Apemantus is of higher strain on the same subject of insincere politeness :

"Aches contract and starve your supple joints !
That there should be small love 'mongst these sweet knaves,
And all this courtesy ! The strain of man 's bred out
Into baboon and monkey.

Who lives that 's not
Depraved, and depraves ? who dies, that bears
Not one spurn to their graves of their friends' gift ?
I should fear, those that dance before me now
Would one day stamp upon me. It has been done ;
Men shut their doors against a setting sun.

What a coil 's here !
Serving of becks, and jutting out of bums !
I doubt whether their legs be worth the sums
That are given for them. Friendship 's full of dregs ;
Methinks, false hearts should never have sound legs.
Thus honest fools lay out their wealth on courtesies."

In this strain Apemantus is consistent throughout. Alceste is not. Oronte reads to him a silly sonnet, and le Misanthrope is as careful of the usages of society in

conveying his censure, as any of the flatterers he condemns. His disapproval is conveyed indirectly; instead of saying at once that the verses are sad trash, he veils his criticism under the pretence of its having been addressed to another:

“ Mais, un jour, à quelqu'un dont je tairai le nom,
Je disois,” &c.

The treatment which the poet experiences from Ape-mantus is of a more decisive character. Alceste, besides, so far from having determined to break “ en visière à tout le genre humain,” is in love, and in love with a flirt of the first magnitude. He is desperately jealous of his rivals; and instead of supporting his misanthropical character is ready to defy them *à l'outrance* for laughing at him. A duellist, not a misanthrope, would have said,

“ Par le sangbleu ! messieurs, je ne croyois pas être
Si plaisant que je suis.”

He experiences all the usual vicissitudes of love,—jealousy, anger, quarrels, reconciliations, and so forth. If we did not find it in the *Misanthrope*, we should be inclined to ascribe the following tender *morceau*—and there are more beside—to as love-smitten a swain as ever talked “ softly to his ladye love.”

Alceste says to Celimone ;

“ Ah ! que vous sçavez bien ici contre moi-même,
Perfide ! vous servir de ma foiblesse extrême,
Et ménager pour vous l'excès prodigieux
De ce fatal amour, né de vos traitres yeux ! ”

We find nothing like this, in the misanthrope drawn by a more vigorous hand. Molière himself seems to have a sharp misgiving as to the consistency of his character, for he makes Philinte say with astonishment

“ De l'humeur dont le Ciel a voulu le former,
Je ne sçai pas comment il s'avise d'aimer.”

He may indeed be well amazed ; but it is also not a little to be wondered that the same consideration did not induce the author to choose a different title for his comedy.

The snarler living in society, and the furious man who has fled from it, meet in the wood. The scene which ensues is the master-piece of the play. The contrast between the hardened practitioner in railing at mankind, the long-trained compound of impudent humorist and sturdy beggar, who never had felt an honourable or generous emotion, and whose career had been devoted to procure under the cover of philosophy and independence, an inglorious living in lazy idleness, by amusing those whose taste lay that

way with scurril ribaldry; and the man who, born in lofty rank, had enjoyed all the luxuries and the splendours of life, who had the mouths, the tongues, the eyes, and hearts of men paying homage to him, who had never bent for favour, save when he thought that he did honour to those of whom he asked it; and now deprived of all that had been his glory and happiness, the gods of his idolatry shattered at one blow, his brilliant sky suddenly overcast, and the rich and bright-coloured rainbow reduced to its original mist and vapour; — the contrast between these, — one content with his lot, and even vain of the position into which he has thrust himself; the other, torn by all the passions of anger and mortification, — is finely conceived and admirably executed. Apemantus tells Timon that his present character springs only from change of fortune; that he is a fool to expose himself to the rigour of woods which have outlived the eagle, while his flatterers wear silk, drink wine, lie soft, and have forgotten his existence; that his sour cold habit has been put on enforcedly; that he would again be a courtier, if he were not a beggar; and, as a moral of his discourse, recommends him to imitate the practices of those who ruined him, — to hinge his knee, crouch, flatter, and betray in turn:

“ ’Tis most just
That thou turn rascal ; hadst thou wealth again,
Rascals should have it.”

Timon scarcely replies to the railing of the cynic, and utterly disdains to notice the scoundrel advice with which he concludes : but he retorts on his unwelcome visitor, that his character also was framed by his circumstances ; that he was born a beggar, and bred a dog ; that his nature commenced in sufferance, and that time made him hard in it ; and that, if he had not been from the earliest moment of his life the most degraded of mankind, he would be a knave and flatterer. In these mutual censures there is a mixture of truth and injustice. That Timon’s misanthropy was forced upon him by the downfall of his fortunes, and the faithlessness of his friends, is true ; but Ape-mantus does not do him justice when he says, that he would return to his old mode of life, if he were to regain his former wealth. The iron has entered too deeply into his soul. Nor has the cynic properly appreciated the character of Timon, when he recommends him to turn rascal. Here he speaks from himself, and is laid defencelessly open to the powerful retort of the fallen gentleman. “ Hadst thou,” says Timon,

“ Like us, from our first swath, proceeded
The sweet degrees that this brief world affords
To such as may the passive drugs of it
Freely command, thou wouldst have plunged thyself
In general riot; melted down thy youth
In different beds of lust, and never learned
The icy precepts of respect; but followed
The sugared game before thee.”

The same selfish mood of temper that rendered the beggar Apemantus insolent, and desirous of vexing whomsoever he met, “always a villain’s office, or a fool’s,” would have made the high-born Apemantus pursue such a course as is here described by Timon; and, if he had broken down in his career, there can scarcely be a doubt that he would have followed the servile advice he tenders. The beggared prodigal would have become a sycophant. But Timon, too, is unjust towards Apemantus when he says,

“All villains that do stand by thee are pure;”

for the cynic had no other villany than impudence and idleness. The fact is, that neither can defend his own conduct, and each is driven to take the ground of impugning that of his accuser. Such a conversation can have but the one end. It must conclude, as it does here in a torrent of mutual abuse; and they depart with increased scorn and contempt of each other.

With the fourth act, the Shakspearian Timon may be said to begin and end. The first act, exhibiting his prodigal extravagance; the second his tottering estate; and the third, his mortification and revenge, are taken from Plutarch; or, if we must speak by the card, from North. There is nothing remarkable in the characters of a prodigal host, a confiding friend, or an irritated benefactor soured by unlooked-for ingratitude. The fourth act is Shakspeare's own. Alarm had made way for rage; rage now bursts into madness uncontrolled. In the other sketches of Timon, he is shown as a splenetic wit; and those who visit him in the hour of his returning wealth are no more than ordinary parasites, plying their well-understood vocation. In the fifth act Shakspeare dramatizes some of the old traditional stories of the man-hater, and the force and energy which he had imparted to the character are immediately weakened. The invitation of all Athenians "in the sequence of degree" to hang themselves, is a touch of mere comedy;* and even his answers to the senators,

* Shakspeare, in introducing this story of the tree, did not take the trouble of recollecting that it is a town story, and not suited for the desert.

"I have a tree, which grows here in my close
That mine own use invites me to cut down,
And I must fell it."

though savage enough, are far removed from the intensity of frenzied hatred exhibited in the fourth act. There he is indeed the *misanthropos* who hates mankind. The poetry of the misanthropic feeling is there fully developed. In Apemantus, his hatred of mankind is a tolerated impertinence, which obtains admission to lordly tables, and affords an opportunity of railing and carping without being exposed to their proper consequences. In Alceste, there is in reality no misanthropy at all; Philinte may well call it a folly:

“ C'est une folie, à nulle autre seconde,
De vouloir se mêler de corriger le monde.”

In Timon it is absolute madness. He goes not about displaying his wit or his ill-nature at the expense of those whom he meets. He flies from all society, and confounds the universal race of man in one common curse. As for correcting the world, he dreams not of such folly. It suits him better to pray for its universal ruin and damnation.

This is the only light in which misanthropy can be

He hardly had a close of his own, or indeed a tree of his own, in the desert, where he dwelt in a cave; besides, he had no necessity for felling any particular tree, or, if he had, there remained enough for the purposes he recommended.

considered for the purposes of poetry. If we do not look upon it as madness, it becomes contemptible. Timon, born to great estate, wastes it in riotous living; and, when his money is gone, he finds it not quite so easy to borrow as it had been with him to lend. The case is far from being uncommon; and it is borne in different ways, according to the different temperaments of men. It drives Timon out of his senses. Gold, and the pomps and vanities which it procures, had been to him everything. Nature had not supplied him with domestic attachments; he is without wife or children, kindred or relations, and he has made no friend. All that he regarded, vanished with his wealth. His soul, like that of the licentiate, Perez Garcia, lay in his purse; when the purse was lost, he lost his senses too. In his prosperity we do not find any traces of affection, honourable or otherwise, for women. In his curses, disrespect for the female sex is remarkably conspicuous. The matron is a counterfeit, her smiling babe is spurious; the virgin is a traitor, there is no chastity which is not to be sacrificed for Gold, that

“ Ever young, fresh, loved, and delicate wooer,
Whose blush doth thaw the consecrated snow
That lies on Dian’s cheek; ”

and those who do make the sacrifice are instantly con-

verted into the plagues and torments of mankind. "There's more gold," he says to Phryne and Timandra, after a speech of frenzied raving;

"Do you damn others, and let this damn you,—
And ditches grace you all!"

These philosophical ladies assure him that they will do anything for gold, and thank him for his compliments:

"More counsel with more money, bounteous Timon!"

He readily believes them to be no worse than the rest of their sex; and, as gold had been his all-in-all, feels no scruple in thinking that its operation ought to be resistless in subverting the honour of women, as well as the faith of men. Nothing, I repeat, except insanity, could raise such a character from contempt; but invest him with madness, and poetry will always be able to rivet our attention, and excite our sympathies for the moody passions of the man hated of the gods, wandering alone over the limitless plain of life without end or object, devouring his own heart, and shunning the paths of men.

No women appear in this play except Phryne and Timandra, and they but in one short scene, when they do not speak, between them, fifty words. This, of itself, is sufficient to keep the play off the stage, for few

actresses will be desirous of appearing in such characters. They are precisely the description of women suited to confirm Timon in his hatred of the human race, and his conviction of the power of money over all. It is unnecessary to say that ladies of a different class of soul are to be found in Shakspeare, but their place is not here. Isabels and Imogens, Juliets and Desdemonas, would have scorned the riot and sycophancy of his prosperous hours, and would have scared away by their unpurchaseable purity the degrading visions of his misanthropical fancies in the wood. The mistresses of Alcibiades [the real Alcibiades, I should imagine, was much "better accommodated" than he appears to be in this play] are Timon's patterns of womankind; as the parasite train, who infested his house, are his patterns of mankind. Yet even he might have seen that his estimate was unjust. The churlish Apemantus, who ate roots while others revelled at his overloaded board, seeks him in the forest to offer something better than roots to mend his feast. His steward, Flavius, approaches him in his calamity with a tender of his dutious service. Alcibiades, the most honoured of his guests, and who never had received any favours at his hands, offers him assistance unasked. These touches of

kindness might have abated his censure, and made him waver in his opinion that he should find in the woods

“The unkindest beast more kinder than mankind.”

But no. The feeling which was at the root of his madness is as conspicuous in his reception of these offers, as in all other parts of his conduct. He patronizes to the end. He is touched by the devotion of Flavius, because he recognises Timon in the light of a master; he declines the gold of Alcibiades, because he wishes to show that *he* has more gold, and can still lavish it; but Apemantus he spurns. He will not accept assistance from a beggar, and a beggar upon whom it would be no matter of pride to waste his bounty, even if the perverse snarler would receive it.

Insanity, arising from pride, is the key of the whole character; pride indulged, manifesting itself indirectly in insane prodigality,—pride mortified, directly in insane hatred. Apemantus was wrong when he told him that he was long a madman, and then a fool. He should have reversed it. Timon was first a fool, and then a madman. Alcibiades sees at a glance that

“his wits

Are drowned and lost in his calamities;”

and for such a catastrophe nothing can be a more unerring preparation than the stubborn will of pride. "Assuredly," says the Laureate, "in most cases, madness is more frequently a disease of the will than of the intellect. When Diabolus appeared before the town of Mansoul, and made his oration to the citizens at Eargate, Lord Will-be-will was one of the first that was for consenting to his words, and letting him into the town." Well may Dr. Southey conclude his speculations on this subject by saying, "In the humorist's course of life, there is a sort of defiance of the world and the world's law; indeed, any man who departs widely from its usages, avows this; and it is, as it ought to be, an uneasy and uncomfortable feeling wherever it is not sustained by a high state of excitement, and that state, if it be lasting, becomes madness."* The Laureate in this sentence has written an unconscious commentary on the Timon of Shakspeare. The soul-stung Athenian, when he

"made his everlasting mansion
Upon the beached verge of the salt flood,"

called himself a misanthrope:—he was a madman!

W. M.

* *The Doctor*, &c. vol. iii. pp. 272 and 281. I believe no secret is violated in attributing this work to Dr. Southey.

. The text of *Timon of Athens* is about the most corrupt of the plays. I suggest a few alterations.

Act iii. Scene 1. Lucullus, wishing to bribe Flavius, says, "Here's three *solidores* for thee." Steevens declares this coin to be from the mint of the poet. It is *saludores*, *i. e.* *saluts-d'or*,—a piece coined in France by our Henry V. See Holinshed, Ruding, Duncange, &c. It is mentioned by Rabelais more than once.

Act iv. Scene 3. "Raise me this beggar, and denude the lord,
The senator shall bear contempt hereditary,
The beggar native honour."

Read—"Robe me this beggar," *i. e.* array the beggar in the robes of the senator, and reduce the senator to the nakedness of the beggar, and contempt and honour will be awarded according to their appearance.

Act iv. Scene 3. Timon, addressing gold, says,
"O thou sweet *king-killer*, and dear divorce
'Twixt natural son and sire!"

Read "*kin-killer*," *i. e.* destroyer of all kindred affection. King-killing was no crime in Athens, where, as Shakspeare knew, there was no king; and all Timon's apostrophes to the wicked power of gold relate not to the artificial laws of society, but to the violation of natural ties, as between son and sire, husband and wife.

Same scene.

"Thou bright defiler
Of Hymen's purest bed! thou valiant Mars!
Thou ever young, *fresh*, *loved*, and delicate wooer," &c.

Perhaps, *fresh-lived*.

POLONIUS.



THIS is a character which few actors like to perform. Custom exacts that it must be represented as a comic part, and yet it wants the stimulants which cheer a comedian. There are no situations or reflections to call forth peals of laughter, or even fill the audience with ordinary merriment. He is played as a buffoon; but the text does not afford the adjuncts of buffoonery; and, in order to supply their place, antic gesture and grimace are resorted to by the puzzled performer. It is indeed no wonder that he should be puzzled, for he is endeavouring to do what the author never intended. It would not be more impossible—if we be allowed to fancy degrees of impossibility—to perform the pantomimic Pantaloon seriously in the manner of King Lear, than to make the impression which Shakspeare desired that Polonius should make, if he be exhibited in the style of the dotard of Spanish or Italian comedy, or the Sganarelle whom Molière has borrowed from them. There is some resemblance in Lord Ogleby; but we cannot persuade ourselves to think that George Colman, elder or younger, could have

written any part in *Hamlet*. I doubt not that both thought their own comedies far superior.

Polonius is a ceremonious courtier; and no more ridicule attaches to him than what attaches to lords of the bedchamber, or chamberlains, or other such furniture of a court in general. It is deemed necessary that kings should be hedged not only by the divinity of their regal honours, but by the more corporal entrenchments of officers of state. In fact it must be so; and in every history of the world we find these functionaries, differing only in name. We know not the internal arrangements of the palaces of the kings that reigned in the land of Edom before there reigned any king over the children of Israel;* but we may be sure that Bela the son of Beor, and Hadad the son of Bedad, who smote Midian in the field of Moab, and Saul of Rehoboth by the river, and Hadar, whose city was Pau, and whose wife was Matred, the daughter of Mezahab, and the other princes of the house of Esau, who appear for a brief moment in the earliest record of human affairs in the book of the world's generation, but to die and make way for others to reign in their stead, had courtiers around them, to whom were allotted duties in fashion different, in spirit

* Gen. xxxvi. 31—39.

the same as those which were performed by the courtly officials of the Byzantium emperors, the togaed comites of the Cæsars, the ruffled and periwigged *gens de la cour* of the Grand Monarque, or the gold sticks and silver sticks of Queen Victoria;—and performed, no doubt, for the same reason—for that con-si-de-ra-ti-on, which, whether in the shape of flocks and herds, or land and beeves, or the more easily managed commodity of shekels and sovereigns, when the secret of “a circulating medium” was discovered, has ever been the stimulants of the general herd attracted to a court. It would be indeed travelling far from the purpose of these papers to talk morals or politics on such a subject; but there can be no harm in saying that, in times of difficulty or danger, when “uneasy is the head that wears a crown,” it is not to them its wearer must look for zeal or assistance. The dog loves the master—the cat loves the house. The nobler animal who couches not in the drawing-room, and is not caressed and pampered with soothing and officious hand, but who guards the dwelling, and follows to the field, may, if treated with kindness, be depended upon to the last. He will die at the feet of a master returning in the twentieth year—will couch upon his grave—will seize his murderer by the throat.

The mere domestic creature, following her instinct, will cling to the house through every change of dynasty, ready to welcome with gratulatory purr whatever hand may rub down her glossy coat, and supply her with customary food, even if that hand should be reeking with the blood of the fallen owner of the mansion in which she had been reared. But the cat is not to be blamed. She acts as nature meant her to act; and what nature is to a cat, habit is to a courtier. Nothing can be more improbable than that the Queen should bother herself—I talk Hibernically—with reading these papers;—nothing is more certain than that, if she does, she will not believe a word of what I am saying. Yet if she lives to the age of the great lady in whose days the creator of Polonius flourished,—and may she so live, equally glorious in her character of Queen, and far happier in her character of woman!—she may be inclined to think that I am right, and that the profession of etiquette, well calculated as it may be to dignify the ceremonial of state, is not to be confounded with the loyalty which inspires

“The manly hearts to guard a throne.”

But it is perfectly natural that the professors of the

science should set a high value upon it. The chamberlain who gave up the monarchy as lost when he saw M. Roland enter the presence of the king with ribbons in his shoes* was perfectly sincere. It was no part of his business to inquire farther than what he saw before him ; he had not to ask into the remoter causes which gave M. Roland the courage or the presumption to violate the laws of court decorum, which the staff-bearer had throughout his life considered to be as steadfast as the laws that regulated the motions of the earth, if indeed he ever condescended to think on such uncourtly trifles. It is easy to laugh at this chamberlain ; but he was substantially right. The kingdom of the doomed Louis did not depend upon stockings or buckles ; but it depended upon the belief that the person of the king was inviolate, and the breach of decorum was but the first step leading to the scaffold. The clown, who troubles not himself with astronomical, meteorological, or chemical studies, knows well that harvest is to follow seed-time, and prognosticates with unerring certainty that the grain which he is scattering in the ground is to ripen into a golden ear ; so our court functionary, who had never dreamt of political speculations, never consulted any

* "Roland the Just with ribbons in his shoes."—*Anti-Jacobin*.

philosophical observers—looked not beyond the circle of the Tuilleries, and would not have understood a single word of Mr. Carlyle's eloquent theories—saw in this one grain of disrespect the coming crop of destruction. I know nothing of his after history—perhaps he emigrated with others of his order; but if he did not originally commit that false step,—and I hope for the honour of so shrewd an observer that he did not—[for what had *he* to do with chivalry?]
—I have little doubt that he found his fitting place among the gold-laced suite of the Emperor,—welcomed with well-trained bows the return of Louis the Eighteenth,—served Charles the Tenth with appropriate ceremony,—and is, I trust, now in his old age discussing the glories of the powdered and rapiered circle of Louis Quinze, beneath the approving smile of Louis Philippe.

Of this race was Polonius. Let not the abstracted sage or the smug sneerer imagine that it was a race of fools. In such courts as those which Shakspeare contemplated they were far from it indeed. They had been bred in camps and colleges—[Polonius had been at the university, where in the dramatic entertainments, usual in the seats of learning in Shakspeare's time, he was selected to perform no less a part than that of Julius Cæsar]
—had acquired the polish of courts,

if, indeed, we should not rather say they created it—mingled habitually among the great and the witty, the graceful and the wise;—but, from perpetually confining themselves to one class of society, and that the most artificial of all classes, and deeming all other interests depending upon that of their masters, as they saw all other persons bowing in subservience before them, it is no wonder that their world was bounded by the precincts of a palace, and their wisdom or ability exerted, as everybody's ability or wisdom is exerted, to shine or thrive by the arts which contributed to make way in the world wherein their lot was cast. Their sphere of courtly duty made them appear to be frivolous;—it does not follow that they were so in life elsewhere.

This distinction is admirably kept up in Polonius. In the presence he is all ceremony and etiquette. He will not open the business of Hamlet's addresses to his daughter, while the ambassadors from Norway are waiting an audience.

“Give first admittance to the ambassadours,
Thy news shall be the fruit of that great feast.”

Who could be better qualified to introduce them with due honours? The king appoints him to the duty at once :—

“Thyself do grace to them, and bring them in.”

He performs his courtly mission, and waits its conclusion before he commences to speak on what concerns his daughter.

“This business is well ended ;”

and now for a speech.

“My liege, and madam, to expostulate
What majesty should be, what duty is,
Why day is day, night night, and time is time,
Were nothing but to waste night, day, and time.”

This is the exordium. We now proceed to the propositio.

“Therefore, since brevity is the soul of wit,
And tediousness the limbs and outward flourishes,
I will be brief. Your noble son is mad.”

The narratio should follow ; but a parenthetical remark cannot be resisted.

“Mad call I it.”

You must take it on my assertion—

“For to define true madness,
What is ’t but to be nothing else but mad ?
But let that go.”

The queen agrees with the orator that it might as well be let go,—for she desires “more matter,” with less art. Her chamberlain, of course, like all rhetoricians, disclaims the employment of rhetorical artifice,—

“Madam, I swear, I use no art at all,”
and proceeds to the narratio, which is again stopped for a moment by a trick of the art which he denies that he is using.

“That he is mad, 'tis true; 'tis true, 'tis pity;
And pity 'tis, 'tis true: a foolish figure;
But farewell it, for I will use no art.
Mad let us grant him then: and now remains
That we find out the cause of this effect;
Or, rather say, the cause of this defect;
For this effect, defective, comes of cause.”

[The argument is strictly logical. It being granted that he is mad, we must find the cause of what logicians call effect—which in common parlance, as applied to the madness of Hamlet, would be called a defect,—we must find it, I say; because whatever an effect may be, defective or not, it must arise from a cause.]

“Thus it remains, and the remainder thus perpend.*
I have a daughter,” &c.

In due course of reasoning he exhibits his proofs—Hamlet's verses and letter, and Ophelia's confessions.

* This line is unnatural. The metre would be right, and the technical arrangement of the style more in character if we read,

Thus it remains: remainder thus perpend.

In equally strict order follows the argument, consisting of an elaborately arranged enumeration of the circumstances attendant on Hamlet's madness :

“ And he, repulsed, (a short tale to make)
Fell into a sadness ; thence into a fast ;
Thence to a watch ; [and] thence into a weakness ;
Thence to a lightness ; and, by this declension,
Into the madness wherein now he raves,
And all we mourn for.”

At this period of the speech, if it were delivered in the House of Commons, there would be loud cries of “Hear, hear,” and the right honourable gentleman would be obliged to pause for several minutes. If he were a rising member, all his friends would come up to congratulate him on his success, and the impression he had obviously made ; if an established speaker, the friends of his party would exclaim, “How admirable !” —“Polonius surpasses himself to-night,” —“Did you ever hear anything so fine, so close, so logical,” &c., &c. The opposite side would be obliged to look candid, and say that it certainly was clever.

All that remains is the peroratio. Cheered by the success of his arguments, he proceeds triumphantly in gratulation of his own sagacity.

“Hath there been such a time (I ’d fain know that)
That I have positively said, ’Tis so,
When it proved otherwise?”

[The king says, “Not that I know”—which is equivalent to “cheers from the ministerial benches.”]

“Take this from this, if this be otherwise.”

[This is a sample of *gestus*. He points to his head and shoulder.]

“If circumstances lead me, I will find
Where truth is hid, though it were hid indeed
Within the centre.”

The speech is over, complete in all its parts. There is scarcely an oratorical figure which is omitted, and it might serve as an unequalled model for many a crack speech “elsewhere.” Who is there that has not heard promises of brevity made preludes to tediousness, and disclaimers of art vehicles of rhetorical flourish? What figure more used than amplification such as that, —prefaced, as usual in such cases, by a declaration that the tale will be short,—in which Polonius employs half a dozen lines to detail the degrees of the madness of Hamlet?—and what practice more common than passionate appeals to the past conduct of the speaker as guarantees for the wisdom and uprightness of the course which on the present occasion he is about to

pursue? The speech of Polonius translated into Ciceronian Latin would be worthy of Cicero himself;—expanded into three columns of a newspaper report, would be the topic of conversation the day after its delivery in all the clubs, and the welcome theme of applause or confutation by the leading-article-manufacturers of both sides of the question.

Here Polonius was in his character of courtier and privy councillor. He had the ear of the King, and he held it fast. His Majesty and his royal consort duly appreciated the merits of the old orator; but as usual in courts, he does not win the same favour in the eyes of Hamlet. The ministers of the existing prince are seldom favourites with his heir-apparent—his immediate Camarilla never. Youth also generally thinks itself wiser than age; and we wonder not to find in the next scene that Hamlet treats Polonius as a driveller. The old gentleman bears courteously with the incivilities of one whom he considers to be either a mere madman or a prankish jester, and, recurring to the days of his youth, excuses the prince for indulging in feelings which lead to derangement of ideas. Even the recollections, however, of the days when, like his contemporary the gravedigger, “he did love, did love,” cannot overcome him to the degree of confessing that

he was actually mad. He suffered much extremity ; but, after all, he was only “very near madness.”*

When the players are introduced, it is only be-

* Is not this dialogue in blank verse? The speech of Polonius certainly is,

“Still harping on
My daughter ! Yet he knew me not at first.
He said, I was a fishmonger. He is
Far gone, far gone ; and truly, in my youth
I suffered extremity for love :
Very near this. I ’ll speak to him again.”

I recommend all future editors of *Hamlet* to restore the original reading of the passage immediately preceding,—

“For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog,
Being a *good*-kissing carrion. Have you a daughter?”

in spite of Warburton’s magnificent comment, which, according to Johnson, sets the critic on a level with the author. “The illative particle [for],” says the bishop, “shows the speaker to be reasoning from something he had said before: what that was we learn in these words, ‘*To be honest, as this world goes, is to be one picked out of ten thousand.*’ Having said this, the chain of ideas led him to reflect upon the argument which libertines bring against Providence from the circumstance of abounding *evil*. In the next speech, therefore, he endeavours to answer that objection, and vindicate Providence even on a supposition of the fact that almost all men were wicked. His argument in the two lines in question is to this purpose. *But why need we wonder at this abounding of evil? For, if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, which though a god, yet shedding its heat and influence upon carrion.* Here he stops short, lest, talking too consequentially, the hearer might suspect his madness to be feigned,—and so turns

coming that he who had so long known what was the *mode* should be their principal critic,—and his criticisms are in the most approved style of *politesse*.

him off from the subject by inquiring of his daughter. But the inference which he intended to make was a very noble one, and to this purpose: If this (says he) be the case, that the effect follows the thing operated upon [*carrion*], and not the thing operating [*a god*], why need we wonder that the Supreme Cause of all things diffusing its blessings on mankind, who is as it were a dead carrion, dead in original sin,—man, instead of a proper return of duty, should breed only corruption and vices? This is the argument at length, and is as noble a one in behalf of providence as could come from the schools of divinity. But this wonderful man had an art not only of acquainting the audience with what his actors *say*, but with what they *think*. The sentiment, too, is altogether in character: for Hamlet is perpetually moralizing, and his circumstances make this reflection very natural."

Surely never before nor since was any poor illative particle, *for*, pressed to perform such hard duty. If Hamlet had *said* all that his theological commentator makes him *think*, Polonius would have set him down as mad, beyond all hope of recovery. I have often thought, while reading this note, that it was a pity Warburton had not written a commentary on the pleadings of the Lord of Baisecul and his antagonist before Pantagruel, and on the judgment delivered in the case by that renowned giant. If he discovered an essay on original sin in this illative particle *for*, he would assuredly have dug up a whole Corpus Theologicum in the law-arguments in Rabelais. The *etc.* of Lyttleton which conveyed so much meaning to the mind of Coke, is not to be compared with the *for* of Warburton. He changed the old reading, "a good-kissing carrion," into "a god kissing carrion."

When Hamlet speaks his part of the tragedy, of course Polonius compliments him for the good accent and good discretion with which he has spoken it.

The meaning of the passage is this. Hamlet suspects that Polonius knows of his love for Ophelia, and that he intends to "loose his daughter to him." He therefore calls him a fishmonger, *i. e.* a purveyor of loose fish. It would not be agreeable in pages which must fall into the hands of the young and fair to follow up the allusion. Polonius interprets the word literally, and is instantly assured that the chances are ten thousand to one if he is as honest as the mere tradesman who sells actual fish. The prince, in his affectation of craziness, proceeds to hint that the consequences of exposing a young lady to the temptations of persons in high rank or of warm blood may be dangerous, and couples the *outré* assertion that the sun can breed maggots with a reference to Polonius's daughter. *Let her not walk in the sun.* Let her not put herself in the peculiar danger to which I allude, and to which her father's performing the part of fishmonger may lead. The sun is a good-kissing carrion—[*carogne*—it is a word which elsewhere occurs in Shakspeare. Quickly, in the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, is called a carrion, &c.]—a baggage fond of kissing. In *Henry IV.* Prince Hal compares the sun to a fair hot wench in flame-coloured taffeta; and if the sun can breed maggots in a dead dog, who knows what may happen elsewhere?

There is a troublesome word in *King Lear*, of which I have never seen a satisfactory interpretation. In the storm of abusive epithets which Kent pours upon the steward, he calls him "a barber-monger." The guesses at the meaning are all insufficient. Perhaps it should read "barbel-monger,"—that is, fishmonger in a peculiar sense. I throw out my conjecture to be rejected at pleasure. I must remark, however, that those who are puzzled by the meaning of a "hundred-pound knave" may find it in

When the player delivers the remainder of the speech, the critic finds it too long. Rebuked by the prince for his censure, he takes the earliest opportunity of declaring that an affected phrase, which startles Hamlet somewhat, to declare that it is good. In the end, when the player displays an emotion roused by his art, Polonius, according to the rules of *goût*, desires that an end should be put to the performance. When the play is actually performed before the king, etiquette keeps him silent until he sees that there is something in it displeasing “in a high quarter,” and then the shrewd courtier stops it at once. It is his voice which directs that they should “give o’er the play.” He is throughout the ceremonious but sagacious *attaché* of a palace; and the king and queen accordingly treat him with the utmost deference, and

Rabelais or Sir Thomas Urquhart. It is a word of reproach addressed to the heavy *pondres-pondres* Germans. It occurs in Bridlegoose’s famous story of the pugnacious Gascon in the camp at Stockholm. Sir John Hawkins, in his absurd life of Dr. Johnson, imagines that it is a word invented by Urquhart, with no more meaning than the ordinary slang words of the day.

In the conclusion of the scene between Hamlet and Polonius, the former exclaims, “These tedious old fools!” Would it not be better, “Thou tedious old fool!”—for it is plain that Hamlet is thinking only of the troublesome old man who has been pestering him.

consult him in their most critical emergencies. He dies in their service, fitly practising a stratagem in perfect accordance with the *morale* of the circle in which he has always moved, and in which he has engaged to show his wisdom, devotion, and address.* Hamlet well characterizes the class of men to which the slain courtier belonged in his farewell to the body.

“Thou busy, rash, intruding fool, farewell;
I took thee for thy better,—take thy fortune.
Thou findest to be too busy is some danger.”

But Polonius is no fool, though he is so called here. Hamlet is annoyed by his meddling and officiousness, and therefore applies the epithet. He marks his sense of his general respect for the old man, even when he is most pestered by his interference. In a peevish exclamation he styles him a “tedious old fool;” but when he sees that the players are inclined to follow

* “Behind the arras I’ll convey myself,
To hear the process; I’ll warrant she’ll tax him home.
And, as you said, and wisely was it said,
’Tis meet that some more audience than a mother,
Since nature makes them partial, should o’erhear
The speech of vantage. Fare you well, my liege.
I’ll call upon you ere you go to bed,
And tell you what I know.”

his own example, he checks them by an authoritative command,

“Follow that lord, and look you mock him not.”

If he calls him to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern “a great baby, not yet out of his swaddling clouts,” and jeers him in their presence, it is partly to show that he is but mad north-north-west, and can know a hawk from a hand-saw when the wind is southerly, and partly to mark that he has discovered the conspiracy against him, and to display his contempt for all engaged in it.

Abstracted from his courtier-character, Polonius is a man of profound sense, and of strict and affectionate attention to his duties. A man whom his children love can never be contemptible. No one, it is said, can be a hero to his *valet de chambre*, because he sees all the petty physical wants and moral defects of his master. How much more difficult to be the object of esteem and devotion in the eyes of those who have turned their eyes upon us from childhood. Natural affection will, of course, do much ; but the buffoon of the stage never could have inspired the feelings exhibited by his children, who must have been perpetually grieved and disgraced by antic buffoonery, of which they, from their

connexion with the court, 'must have been constant witnesses. Laertes, a fine high-spirited young gentleman, and Ophelia, the Rose of May, the grace and ornament of the circle in which she moved, could not have so deeply revered and so bitterly deplored their father, if he had been indeed a great baby still in his swaddling clouts. The *double* of Pantaloon, whom we see tumbling about in Drury Lane or Covent Garden, would not have roused the blood of Laertes to fury, still less led him to justify assassination in avenging his fall ; nor would his death have driven Ophelia to madness. Such a father might be dead and gone,

“ And at his head a grass-green turf,
And at his heels a stone,”

according to the inflexible laws of mortality ; but his son would soon wipe the natural tears he might drop, and let him lie in his grave without any complaint of

“ His obscure funeral;
No trophy, sword, nor hatchment o'er his bones ;
No noble rite, nor formal ostentation.”

Nor would his daughter, in her broken-hearted insanity, have imagined that at his death violets, the sweetest flowers of the spring, had universally withered. Let me observe, that by this remark I mean no disrespect

to our actors, many of the most eminent of whom have performed the part. They yield to long-established custom, and, as the part is not of the same importance in the play as Shylock in the *Merchant of Venice*, it is not probable that any Macklin will arise to rescue him from buffoonery. Besides, as it is necessary that he should in one part of the play designedly act up to the follies of Hamlet, it would be difficult to make the distinction between the assumed and the natural character; and yet perhaps it ought to be attempted, for, as it is played at present, it is perhaps the least attractive of the prominent *dramatis personæ* of Shakspeare.

Even in the very part to which I have just alluded, where he is fooling Hamlet to the top of his bent, he cannot avoid displaying glances of his habitual shrewdness. He suspects the reality of the madness from the beginning. The insulting taunts addressed to him at second hand from Juvenal only call forth the reflection that there is method in the madness. In the end he plainly considers it as nothing more than a prank. He bids the Queen

“Tell him his pranks have been too broad to bear with,
And that your grace hath screened and stood between
Much heat and him.”

Neither Laertes nor Ophelia are present while he is

engaged in bandying folly against folly, and he therefore does not such before those by whom he most desires to be respected. When alone with them, his true character appears ;—and what can be more sensible? His counsels to his son have never been for worldly wisdom surpassed. The ten precepts of Lord Burleigh, addressed to his son Robert, on which it is generally supposed the apophthegms of Polonius are based, are perhaps equal in shrewdness, but they want the pithiness and condensation of verse. Neither are they as philosophical, being drawn, to talk logically, *à posteriori*, while those of Shakspeare are deduced *à priori*. Take, for example, Lord Burleigh's fifth maxim on borrowing and lending money :—

“Beware of suretyship for thy best friends. He that payeth another man's debts seeketh his own decay. But if thou canst not otherwise choose, rather lend thy money thyself upon good bonds, although thou borrow it ; so shalt thou secure thyself, and pleasure a friend. Neither borrow money of a neighbour or a friend, but of a stranger, where, paying for it, thou shalt hear no more of it, otherwise thou shalt eclipse thy credit, loose thy freedom, and pay as dear as to another. But in borrowing of money be precious of thy word, for he that

takes care of keeping payment is lord of another man's purse."

Full of practical good sense, no doubt, as indeed is everything that "wise Burleigh spoke;" but it might occur to minds of smaller calibre than that of the Lord High Treasurer. Polonius takes higher ground.

"Neither a borrower nor a lender be;
For loan oft loses both itself and friend;
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry."

Lord Burleigh gives us but the petty details,—in Shakspeare we find the principle.

Again, his Lordship's ninth precept is:—

"Trust not any man with thy life, credit, or estate;
for it is mere folly for a man to enthrall himself to a friend, as though, occasion being offered, he should not care to become thine enemy."

It is good advice; but how much better done by Polonius!

"This above all. To thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man."

A comparison of all the precepts of the poet and the statesman would yield a similar result. And yet nobody ever thought of exhibiting Burleigh, inferior as he is

in dramatical wisdom, as an object of merriment upon the stage for many a year after he had been gathered to his fathers, until it pleased the author of the *Critic* to put him forward to make his oracular nod. There is no use in moralizing, but we cannot help reflecting that Sheridan would have done better in life if he could have followed the prudential advice of the great minister whom he mocked. It is certain that if he had avoided mimicking him at humble distance elsewhere, and never thought of playing at Parliament,—if, content with winning dramatic honours only second to those of Molière, he had eschewed throwing himself into paths where the half-nods of the less than tenth-rate Burleighs are of more weight than all the wit and genius of the *School for Scandal*, there would not have been any necessity that his death should be neglected and his funeral honoured, with a contempt and a sympathy equally characteristic of those whom his Lordship calls “the glow-worms, I mean parasites and sycophants, who will feed and fawn upon thee in the summer of prosperity, but in adverse storms they will shelter thee no more than an harbour in winter.”

That the austere Lord High Treasurer might have been the mark for the covert wit of the dramatist,—covert indeed, for in his time, or in that which imme-

diately succeeded it, there was no safety in making unseemly jests too openly about him,—is highly probable; and the enemy of Essex and Raleigh* could not be an object of admiration in the eyes of Shakspeare. Lord Burleigh, in his courtly demeanour, was as observant of etiquette as Polonius, and as ready in using indirections to find thereby directions out. The Queen was fond both of ceremony and statecraft: but I doubt much that the old gentleman in *Hamlet* is intended for anything more than a general personification of ceremonious courtiers. If Lord Chesterfield had designed to write a commentary upon Polonius, he could not have more completely succeeded than by writing his famous letters to his son. His Lordship, like every man of taste and virtue, and what Pope has comprehended in the expressive term of “all that,” in his time utterly

* Even in these precepts his lordship cannot avoid a “gird” at those remarkable men whose accomplishments were, however, much more likely to please poets and adventurers than sober statesmen. We know how Spenser immortalizes the *Shepherd of the Ocean*, and with what pomp of verse “the general of our gracious emperess” is introduced almost by name in the chorus of *Henry V.* Shakspeare’s most national play, as a fit object of comparison with the hero of Azincour himself. In Lord Burleigh they only appear as suiteth examples to point the moral of a maxim. “Yet I advise thee not to affect or neglect popularity too much. *Seek not to be Essex—shun to be Raleigh.*”

despised Shakspeare. There is nothing to blame in this. What can we talk on but of what we know? One of the grandest of the herd, Horace Walpole, wrote the *Mysterious Mother*, and therefore he had a right (had he not?) to offer an opinion on *Macbeth*, and to pronounce *Midsummer Night's Dream* a bundle of rubbish, far more ridiculous than the most absurd Italian opera. Lord Chesterfield wrote nothing, that I know of, to give him a name as an author, except his letters. Of course he wrote despatches, protocols, and other such ware, worthy, no doubt, of the Red Tapery of which he was so eminent a member.

IAGO.

I HAVE been accused by some who have taken the trouble of reading these papers, that I am fond of paradoxes, and write not to comment upon Shakspeare, but to display logical dexterity in maintaining the untenable side of every question. To maintain that Falstaff was in heart melancholy and Jaques gay, to contrast the fortunes of Romeo and Bottom, or to plead the cause of Lady Macbeth, is certainly not in accordance with

the ordinary course of criticism ; but I have given my reasons, sound or unsound as they may be, for my opinions, which I have said with old Montaigne, I do not pretend to be good, but to be *mine*. What appears to me to be the distinguishing feature of Shakspeare is, that his characters are real men and women, not mere abstractions. In the best of us all there are many blots, in the worst there are many traces of goodness. There is no such thing as angels or devils in the world. We have passions and feelings, hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, pretty equally distributed among us ; and that which actuates the highest and the lowest, the most virtuous and the most profligate, the bravest and meanest, must, in its original elements, be the same. People do not commit wicked actions from the mere love of wickedness ; there must always be an incentive of precisely the same kind as that which stimulates to the noblest actions—ambition, love of adventure, passion, necessity. All our virtues closely border upon vices, and are not unfrequently blended. The robber may be generous—the miser, just—the cruel man, conscientious—the rake, honourable—the fop, brave. In various relations of life, the same man may play many characters as distinct from one another as day from night. I venture to say that the creatures of Boz's

fancy, Fagin or Sikes, did not appear in every circle as the unmitigated scoundrels we see them in *Oliver Twist*. It is, I suppose, necessary to the exigencies of the tale, that no other part of their characters should be exhibited; but, after all, the Jew only carries the commercial, and the housebreaker the military principle, to an extent which society cannot tolerate. In element, the feeling is the same that covers the ocean with the merchant-flags of England, and sends forth the hapless boys to the trade of picking pockets—that inspires the highwayman to stop a traveller on Hounslow, and spirits the soldier to face a cannon at Waterloo. Robber, soldier, thief, merchant, are all equally men. It is necessary for a critical investigation of character, not to be content with taking things merely as they seem. We must endeavour to strip off the covering with which habit or necessity has enveloped the human mind, and to inquire after motives as well as look to actions. It would not be an unamusing task to analyze the career of two persons starting under similar circumstances, and placed in situations not in essence materially different, one ending at the debtors' door of Newgate, amid hootings and execrations, and the other borne to his final resting-place in Westminster Abbey, graced by all the pomps that heraldry can bestow.

As Shakspeare therefore draws men, and not one-sided sketches of character, it is always possible to treat his personages as if they were actually existing people; and there is always some redeeming point. The bloody Macbeth is kind and gentle to his wife; the gore-stained Richard, gallant and daring; Shylock is an affectionate father, and a good-natured master; Claudius, in *Hamlet*, is fond of his foully-won queen, and exhibits, at least, remorse for his deed in heart-rending soliloquies; Angelo is upright in public life, though yielding to sore temptation in private; Cloten is brutal and insulting, but brave; the ladies are either wholly without blemishes, or have merits to redeem them: in some plays, as *Julius Cæsar*, *Coriolanus*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and several others, no decidedly vicious character is introduced at all. The personages introduced are exposed to the frailties of our nature, but escape from its grosser crimes and vices.

But Iago! Ay! there's the rub. Well may poor Othello look down to his feet, and not seeing them different from those of others, feel convinced that it is a fable which attributes a cloven hoof to the devil. His next test,

“If that thou be'st a devil, I cannot kill thee” *—

affords a proof that Iago is not actually a fiend, for he wounds him; but still he cannot think him anything less than a “demi-devil,” being bled, not killed. Nor is it wonderful that the parting instruction of Lodovico to Cassio, should be to enforce the most cunning cruelty of torture on the hellish villain, or that all the party should vie with each other in heaping upon him words of contumely and execration. He richly deserved them. He had ensnared the soul and body of Othello to do the most damnable actions; he had been the cause of the cruel murder of Desdemona; he had killed his own wife, had plotted the assassination of Cassio, had betrayed and murdered Roderigo. His determination to keep silence when questioned, was at least judicious:

“Demand me nothing: what you know, you know;
From this time forth I never will speak word:”

for with his utmost ingenuity he could hardly find any-

* After this line he wounds Iago. Then follows:

“*Lod.* Wrench his sword from him.
Iago. I bleed, sir, but not killed.”

This is strange language. Should it not be “I, [*i. e.* Ay, as usual in Shakspeare,] *bled*, sir, but not killed?”

thing to say for himself. Is there nothing, then, to be said for him by anybody else?

No more than this. He is the sole exemplar of studied personal revenge in the plays. The philosophical mind of Hamlet ponders too deeply, and sees both sides of the question too clearly, to be able to carry any plan of vengeance into execution. Romeo's revenge on Tybalt for the death of Mercutio is a sudden gust of ungovernable rage. The vengeance in the historical plays are those of war or statecraft. In Shylock, the passion is hardly personal against his intended victim. A swaggering Christian is at the mercy of a despised and insulted Jew. The hatred is national and sectarian. Had Bassanio or Gratiano, or any other of their creed, been in his power, he would have been equally relentless. He is only retorting the wrongs and insults of his tribe, in demanding full satisfaction, and imitating the hated Christians in their own practices.

“ And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?

If we are like you in the rest, we will

Resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong

A Christian, what is *his* humility?

Revenge!

[And] if a Christian wrong a Jew, what should

His sufferance be by Christian example?

Why, [sir] revenge! The villany you teach me

I'll execute, and it shall go hard, but
I'll better the instruction.*

It is, on the whole, a passion remarkably seldom exhibited in Shakspeare in any form. Iago, as I have said, is its only example, as directed against an individual.

Iago had been affronted in the tenderest point. He felt that he had strong claims on the office of lieutenant to Othello, who had witnessed his soldierly abilities

“ At Rhodes, at Cyprus, and on other grounds,
Christian and heathen.”

The greatest exertion was made to procure it for him, and yet he is refused. What is still worse, the grounds

* Printed as prose in the editions. The insertion of *and* before *if*, where it may serve as the ordinary copulative,—or as the common form, *an if*, perpetually recurring, as in Romeo, “*an if* a man did need a poison now,” [on which form I may remark in passing, Horne Tooke talks ignorantly enough in his *Diversions of Purley*,]—and of a monosyllable between *why* and *revenge*, makes the whole passage metrical. I am inclined to think that *revenge* should be repeated in the concluding lines. “If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? REVENGE!” If, on the contrary, a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be?

“ REVENGE! REVENGE! The villany you teach me
I'll execute.”

As an editor I might scruple to exhibit the text thus. I should recommend it to an actor in place of the prosaic and unmetrical—*Why, revenge.*

of the refusal are military : Othello evades the request of the bowing magnificoes

“ with a bombast circumstance,
Horribly stuffed with epithets of war.”

He assigns to the civilians reasons for passing over Iago, drawn from his own trade, of which they of course could not pretend to be adequate judges. And worst of all, when this practised military man is for military reasons set aside, who is appointed? Some man of greater renown and skill in arms? *That* might be borne; but it is no such thing. The choice of Othello lights upon

“ Forsooth, a great arithmetician,
One Michael Cassio, a Florentine,
A fellow almost damned in a fair wife,*

* This is one of the most puzzling lines in Shakspeare. All the explanations are forced. Cassio had no wife, and his treatment of Bianca, who stands in place of one, is contemptuous: nor does he let her stand in the way of his duty. She tenderly reproaches him for his long absence, and he hastily sends her home, harshly saying,

“ I do attend here on the general,
And think it no addition, nor my wish
To have him see me *woman'd*.”

Tyrwhitt reads *damned in a fair life*; interpreting it as an allusion to the judgment denounced in the gospel, against those of whom all men speak well, which is very far-fetched indeed. If *life* were the reading, it might signify that Cassio was damned for the rough life of a soldier by the fair, *i. e.* the easy life he had hitherto led. John-

That never set a squadron in the field,
 Nor the division of a battle knows,
 More than a spinster ; unless the bookish theoric,
 Wherein the toged consuls can propose
 As masterly as he : mere prattle, without practice,
 Is all his soldiership."

It is an insult hard to be borne, as many an H. P. will be ready to testify. We will find in many professional periodical works the complaint reiterated, that

son gives it up, as a passage "which, for the present, must be resigned to corruption and obscurity." A writer in one of the early volumes of *Blackwood's Magazine*, proposed somewhat ingeniously

" A great arithmetician,
 A fellow almost damned : in a fair *wise*,
 Who never set a squadron in the field."

But this is not satisfactory. Why is Cassio a fellow almost damned? Like Dr. Johnson, " I have nothing that I can, with any approach to confidence, propose," but I think that the word " damned " is a corruption of some word which signified delicate, soft, dainty, or something of the kind, and that for "*in*" we should read " as." " A fellow almost as soft and delicate as a fair wife," as dainty as a woman. I am not fortunate to supply it, but I have somewhat thought it was

" A fellow almost *trimmed* as a fair wife."

Such a fellow as the " neat and *trimly* dressed " courtier, " perfumed as a milliner," who excited the impatience of Hotspur. *As a fair wife*, corresponds to *more than a spinster*, in the conclusion of the sentence. I throw out my hint for the leading or misleading of future editors.

I cannot help remarking that Colonel Mitchell, in his noble life of Wallenstein, seems to have no better opinion of the " arithmeti-

“ there’s no remedy, ’tis the curse of service :
Preferment goes by letter and affection,
Not by old gradation, where each second
Stood heir to the first :”

and many a curse, loud and deep, is inflicted on that account upon the Horse Guards and Admiralty, who fortunately have no individual responsibilities on which the disappointed ancients can fasten. I am sure that no British soldier or sailor would carry his anger farther than a passing growl, but the example of Bellingham shows that even in our assassin-hating nation, a feeling of injustice done by a superior, will drive a man to satiate his vengeance even upon those who have not done him wrong.

cians” of Shakspeare’s day than Iago. George Basta, the celebrated tactician, was contemporary with Shakspeare. Wallenstein served under him, and Colonel Mitchell makes somewhat the same complaint of the want of preferment of his hero as the disappointed ancient. “ As to George Basta,” he says, “ if we may judge of him by his system of tactics, which was then exactly what Saldera’s is now, and which, when the object of such a system is considered, must be looked upon as second only, in feebleness and insufficiency, to the one followed in our own time, he was not a likely person to appreciate talent, or to encourage and call forth genius.” Nor, indeed, is the Colonel very complimentary to the army to which Iago belongs. He calls them “ the worthless mercenaries of Venice, troops constantly kept in a state of mutiny and insufficiency, by the ignorant fears of their despicable government.”

In the country of Iago, whether from his name we conclude it to be Spain, or from his service, Italy, none of the scruples, or rather principles, which actuate or restrain English gentlemen, existed. Least of all were they to be found in the motley armies of adventurers gathered from all quarters, the outcasts

——“ of all foreign lands,
Unclaimed by town or tribe, to whom belongs
Nothing, except the universal sun :”*

and Iago could not be expected to be very scrupulous as to his method of compassing his revenge. But how effect it? He is obliged to admit that Othello’s standing in the state is too important to render it possible that public injury could be done to him. He is well aware that

“ the state

* * * *

Cannot with safety cast him ; he’s embarked
With such loud reasons to the Cyprus war,
Which e’en now stands in act, that for their souls
Another of his fathom they have not
To lead their business.”

In his unhoused condition no point of vantage presented itself whence harm could be wrought. Just then, when

* Schiller. *The Piccolomini*, Ac. iv. s. 5.

Iago's heart was filled with rage, and his head busily but vainly occupied in devising means for avenging himself on the man by whom that rage was excited, just then *Até*, the Goddess of Mischief, supplies him with all that deepest malignity could desire, by the hasty, ill-mated, and unlooked-for marriage of Othello. It was a devil-send that the most sanguine spirit could not have anticipated, and Iago clutched it accordingly with passionate eagerness. He was tempted and he fell.

When he first conceived his hatred against Othello, he had no notion that it would be pushed to such dire extremity. Revenge is generally accompanied by vanity, indeed there must be always a spice of vanity in a revengeful disposition. He who so keenly feels and deeply resents personal injury or affront, must set no small value upon himself. The proud are seldom revengeful—the great never. We accordingly find that Iago engages in his hostilities against Othello, more to show his talents than for any other purpose. He proudly lauds his own powers of dissimulation, which are to be now displayed with so much ability.

“When my outward action doth demonstrate
The native act and figure of my heart
In compliment extern, 'tis not long after

But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve
For daws to peck at. I am not what I am.*

He fancies himself superior to all around in art and knowledge of the world. Roderigo is a mere gull:—

“ Thus do I ever make my fool my purse ;
For I mine own gain'd knowledge should profane,
If I should time expend with *such a snipe*,
But for my sport and profit.”

Cassio he considers to be not merely unskilled in war, but a fool:—

“ For while *this honest fool*
Plies Desdemona to repair his fortunes,” &c.

Othello is an ass in his estimation:—

“ The Moor is of a free and open nature,
That thinks men honest that but seem to be so,
And will as tenderly be led by the nose
As asses are.”

The “*inclining*” Desdemona he utterly despises, as one who fell in love with the Moor merely for his bragging, and telling fantastical lies. His wife he calls a

* Can these last words be intended as a somewhat profane allusion to the title by which the Almighty reveals himself to Moses? Exod. iii. 14. I AM THAT I AM is the name of the God of truth. *I am not what I am* is therefore a fitting description of a premeditated liar.

fool; and with these opinions of his great superiority of wisdom and intellect, he commences operations to enmesh them all, as if they were so many puppets. It would be a strange thing, indeed, he reflects, if I were to permit myself to be insulted, and my rights withheld, by such a set of idiots, whom I can wind round my finger as I please.

He seated him in the seat of the scorner, a character which he who is accounted the wisest of men continually opposes to that of true wisdom. "Seest thou," says Solomon, in the Proverbs copied out by the men of Hezekiah, King of Judah, which, whether they be inspired or not, are aphorisms of profound and concentrated wisdom,—“seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him.”* And the career of Iago ends with his own destruction, amid the abomination set down in another chapter of Proverbs as the lot of the scorner. The jealousy of Othello is not more gradually and skilfully raised and developed than the vengeance of Iago. At first angry enough, no doubt; but he has no defined project. He follows the Moor to take advantage of circumstances to turn them to his own use. Nothing of peculiar

* Prov. xxvi. 12. “The scorner is an abomination to men,” occurs in chap. xxiv. 9.

malignity is thought upon : if he can get Cassio's place, he will be satisfied.

“Cassio 's a proper man : let me see now,
To get his place——.”

The marriage and the sight of Desdemona point out to him a ready way of accomplishing this object. The thought occurs suddenly, and he is somewhat startled at first. He asks himself with eager repetition,

“How ? how ?”

and pauses to think—

“Let me see ——.”

It is soon settled.

“After some time, to abuse Othello's ear,
That he is too familiar with his wife.”

But it still alarms him :

“I have it—It's engendered : Hell and night
Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light.”

The plot is not matured even when they all arrive at Cyprus.

“'Tis here, but yet confused—
Knavery's plain face is never seen till used.”

When once fairly entered upon, however, it progresses with unchecked rapidity. He is himself hurried resistlessly forward by the current of deceit and iniquity in

which he has embarked. He is as much a tool or passive instrument as those whom he is using as such.

Some critics pronounce his character unnatural, as not having sufficient motive for the crimes he commits. This is not wise. He could not help committing them. Merely to put money in his purse, he gulled Roderigo into a belief that he could assist the poor dupe in his suit to Desdemona. There is no remarkable crime in this. Nor can we blame him for being angry at being somewhat scornfully passed over; we can, at all events, enter into his feelings when he wishes to undermine one whom he considers to be unworthily preferred to him, and to obtain a place which he thinks should be his own, if patronage had been justly dispensed. It was a base thing, indeed, to malign a lady, and possess her husband with jealousy; but he could not have calculated on the harvest of death and crime which the seed of suspicion that he was sowing was destined to bring up. When he makes Cassio drunk, he only anticipates that he will put him in such action as may offend the isle. When framing the device that is to destroy the lieutenant, no thoughts of murder arise before him.

He has no regard for the feelings of Othello, but dreams not that he will kill Desdemona, whom he says

he loves. As for the lady herself, his low estimation of woman would of course lead him to think but little about her peace and quiet. He excuses himself, besides, by referring to the rumour that Othello had given him cause to be jealous. It is plain that he does not pretend to lay any great stress upon this; nor can we suppose that, even if it were true, it would deeply affect him; but he thinks lightly of women in general, and has no respect whatever for his wife. Indeed, Othello does not hold Emilia in much esteem; and her own conversation with Desdemona, as she is undressing her for bed (act iv. scene 3), shows that her virtue was not impregnable. The injury, therefore, Iago was about to do Desdemona, in lessening her in the respect of her husband by accusing her of such an ordinary offence as a deviation from chastity, and one which *he* did not visit with any particular severity on his own wife, must have seemed trivial. He could not have been prepared for the dire tempest of fury which his first hint of her unfaithfulness aroused in the bosom of Othello. Up to that moment he had done nothing more than gull a blockhead, and endeavour by unworthy means to undermine a rival; trickery and slander, though not very honourable qualities, are not of such rare occurrence in the world as to call for the expression of any peculiar

indignation, when we find them displayed by a clever and plotting Italian.

They have, however, led him to the plain and wide path of damnation. He cannot retract his insinuations. Even if he desired, Othello will not let him:

“Villain, be sure you prove my love a whore.”

[We may observe that he still, though his suspicions are so fiercely roused, calls her his *love*. It is for the last time before her death. After her guilt is, as he thinks, proved, he has no word of affection for her. She is a convicted culprit, to be sacrificed to his sense of justice.]

“Be sure of it; give me the ocular proof:
Or, by the worth of mine eternal soul,
Thou hadst been better have been born a dog
Than answer my waked wrath,

— — —
Make me to see 't, or, at the least, so prove it,
That the probation bear no hinge, nor loop
To hang a doubt on; or woe upon thy life!”

Iago, therefore, had no choice but to go forward. He was evidently not prepared for this furious outburst; and we may acquit him of hypocrisy when he prays Othello to let her live. But Cassio must die:—

“He hath a daily beauty in his life
That makes me ugly.”

A more urgent reason immediately suggests itself:—

“And besides, the Moor
May unfold me to him : there stand I in much peril.
No—he must die.”

The death of Desdemona involves that of Roderigo:—

“Live Roderigo ?
He calls me to a restitution large
Of gold and jewels, that I bobb'd from him
As gifts to Desdemona.
It must not be.”

Here is the direct agency of necessity. He *must* remove these men. Shortly after, to silence the clamorous testimony of his wife, he *must* kill her. He is doomed to blood.

CHARACTER OF HAMLET.



“ So Ecstasy,
 Fantastic Dotage, Madness, Frenzy, Rapture
 Of mere Imagination, differ partly
 From MELANCHOLY, which is briefly thus :
 A mere commotion of the Mind—overcharged
 With Fear and Sorrow, first began i' th' brain,
 The seat of Reason ; and from thence derived
 As suddenly into the heart, the seat
 Of our affections.”—FORD'S *Lovers*.

SHAKSPEARE has written plays, and these plays were acted ; and they succeeded ; and by their popularity the author achieved a competency, on which he was enabled to retire from the turmoils of a theatrical life to the enjoyment of a friendly society and his own thoughts. Yet am I well convinced, it is impossible that any one of Shakspeare's dramatic works—and especially of his tragedies, touching one of which I mean to speak—ever could be satisfactorily represented upon the stage. Laying aside all other reasons, it would be, in the first place, necessary to have a company such as was never yet assembled and no money could at any time have procured—a company, namely, in which every actor should be a man of mind and feeling : for in these dramas

every part is a character, fashioned by the touch of Genius ; and, therefore, every part is important. But of no play is this more strictly true than it is of that strange, and subtle, and weird work, *Hamlet*.

“ The heartache,
And the thousand natural ills the flesh is heir to ; ”

human infirmities, human afflictions, and supernatural agency, are so blended—questions and considerations of Melancholy, of Pathology, Metaphysics, and Demonology, are so intertangled—the powers of man’s Will, which are well nigh almighty, and the dictates of inexorable Fate, are brought into such an appalling yet dim collision, that to wring a meaning from a work else inscrutable requires the exercise of every faculty, and renders it necessary that not an incident should escape the observation, that not a word should be passed over, without being scanned curiously.

Hamlet is, even more peculiarly than *Lear*, or *Macbeth*, or *Othello*, a play for the study. And not this alone ; for it is, in good sooth, a work for the high student, who, through the earnestness of his Love, the intensity of his Thought, the pervading purity of his Reason, and the sweep and grasp of his Imagination, is, the while he reads, always thrilled

by kindred inspirations—sometimes visited by dreams, and not left unblessed by visions. To speak in other words, *Hamlet* is essentially a work for the student of Genius. And Genius, I consider with Coleridge, to be the action of Imagination and Reason—the highest faculty of intellectual man, as contradistinguished from Understanding, that interprets for us the various phenomena of the world in which we live, giving to each its objectivity. But Coleridge does not go far enough in this his description of Genius. It is the action of Reason and Imagination, tempered, and regulated, and controlled, and affected by the Understanding: for the instinct of Reason is to contradict the understanding, and to strip what we call substances, and our sensations with respect to them, of their fantasies; and this action of Reason and Imagination obviously must become, with reference to the rest of mankind, madness—if it be not cognizant of conventional realisms—if it be not operated upon by worldly circumstances, which exercise an attractive power to prevent it from wandering from the sphere in which we move, or are, haply, “crawling ’twixt earth and heaven.” This, I fancy, will reconcile all the notions that have been wisely uttered with respect to Genius—notions which are

severally true—but none in themselves wholly true. Coleridge declares, “Genius must have Talent as its complement and implement, just as in like manner Imagination must have Fancy. In short, the higher intellectual powers can act through a corresponding energy of the lower.”

Now Talent, he himself tells us, lies in the Understanding, and, therefore, may be inherited; by which he must mean, an apt organic conformation, and a happy mental disposition to a particular talent—such as that for painting or singing, or play-acting, or any fantastic mechanical art—may be inherited; of the which, the most extraordinary instances are recorded. But this is beside the subject. To proceed: if Talent, which lieth in the Understanding, be essential to Genius, it follows that Experience and Time, and the same use of the physical organs with respect to the external world, are necessary to Genius; and thus it is we can concur with Johnson in the opinion, not that Genius is “a knowledge of the use of instruments,” but that this divine knowledge is one of its noblest attributes; and we can assent to the proposition that, “Genius is the philosophy of human life.” So it is; but it is much more also. The very first step of real philosophy is the passing from

without mere self—the annihilation, so to speak, of the self-selfish. And thus can I, without going beyond the limits of my description, assent to these downright practical views of it; and yet, at the same time, agree with Coleridge, that, “all Genius is metaphysical, because the *ultimate* end of Genius is ideal, however it may be actualized by incidental and accidental circumstances.”

After this explanation, I may go on to repeat that *Hamlet* is essentially a work for the student of Genius, who, as a necessary consequence of his diviner intellect, is devoted to those sad and solemn themes of Research and Labor that encumber and enwrap our mortal existence; and whose mysteries (vain though it be!) he must, with a fond despair, to the last struggle to unveil. Such are the phenomena of our own being, our “fearful and wonderful” construction—Birth, Life, Death—the secrets of the Grave—the dread Hereafter, and the dreams that it may bring—the powers of our own Will—“are they not illimitable, and ought they not to be omnipotent?” our own minds and faculties viewed, dissected, pored over pathologically, considered in every state, from health to disease in its more dire form, God, Destiny, Free-will, Duty—the obstinate questionings of the spirit,

touching the realism and the phantasmal forms of things—and all such other matters of fearful and forlorn speculation; and together with these, moreover, all arts and sciences that minister thereunto, that flatter us with the possibility of elevating ourselves above the conditions of our humanity, and achieving a satisfactory solution of the doubts that torture us, and that, by sublimating our thoughts, by spiritualizing our minds, by accustoming them to wander free from all corporeal considerations and volitions, by drawing us so constantly into a world of shadows, do actually make us sceptical of every thing in this world wherein we have our being. These are the studies that make bloodless the face, and plough the deep wrinkles into the brow of youth; these are the studies that make sad the heart of man with the vanity of vast knowledge, with bootless aspirations, with fond longings; these are the studies

“That cloud the mind, that fire the brain,”

that are withering to mortals—*αὐτὸνὰ βροτοῖς*.

Now this leads me to observe, that the student of Genius finds in Hamlet the man a kindred spirit—in Hamlet the play, a subject for study, analogous to those others whereof I have spoken, and with which

he is familiar; and when, with reverential Love, which is the first faculty of men and angels (for the seraphim, angels of Love, are declared to be the highest in the Celestial Hierarchy—and here on Earth, be it remembered, that for the Love which beat in Mary Magdalene's bosom all her sins were forgiven her by the Saviour), and with earnest knowledge, *that* student has studied *that* Hamlet, he will yet find himself at the end, as after those other labors, afflicted with the sickness of Desire, ungratified—with the hollow-heartedness of Doubt—with the sensation of having been acted upon by an inscrutable power.

Consider *Hamlet* in whatsoever light you will, it stands quite alone—most peculiarly apart, from every other play of Shakspeare's. A vast deal has been written upon the subject, and by a great number of commentators—by men born in different countries—educated after different fashions—moving in different grades of society—bred to the pursuit of different professions, avocations, occupations, from necessity or choice—gifted with different intellectual powers—possessing learning of different species, and in degrees—and, finally, born in different ages of the world; yet it requires no very earnest examination and reflection to satisfy one's mind that, up to the present moment,

little indeed has been written to the purpose. At first, this seemed strange. Contemplating the labors of a miscellaneous multitude, I was surprised that the several deficiencies of the one individual had not been successively supplied by the others—that each had not, after his lights and information, been enabled to furnish some valuable contribution to the general stock, which, by the agency of some plastic hand, might have ere now been moulded into a mass, well proportioned, clearly developed, available and satisfactory to the ordinary student: and for this last work the inspiration of Genius would not have been required. But upon thinking more deeply, and in a wiser spirit, because with a more reverential consideration of the author, I became conscious that a true comment on *Hamlet* could no more be the product of labor by a number of minds, than could the astounding drama itself be born as it is, a harmonious and complete creation, otherwise than by the throes of one all-sufficing Intelligence. As a single soul inspired the work, so should a single soul be breathed through the comment; and it should be, moreover, of a kindred order. The partial labors of a number of commentators produce merely bundles of sentences—sand without lime—things incongruous and worth-

less, because they are interpenetrated by no binding and dominant spirit. When we perceive and acknowledge this, as we needs must, the marvel ceases: the failure of the multitude was inevitable. We might hope to see a second Shakspeare, if the world had ever produced a commentator worthy of *Hamlet*. The qualities and faculties such a man should possess would be, indeed, "rare in their separate excellence, wonderful in their combination." Such a man as Shakspeare imagined in him to whom his hero bequeathed the task of

"Reporting him and his cause aright
To the unsatisfied,"—

such a man as Horatio, the profound scholar and the perfect gentleman, might have done it; but where in the actual world, that holds nothing of unmixed purity, can be found a man possessing the heart so bold and gentle—the feelings so exquisitely refined—the deep knowledge of man, and of all human learning—the proud exemption from the weaknesses and passions of frail mortals, that should qualify him for such a task? Alas! nowhere. But although we may not hope to see such a paragon upon earth, yet is it a gracious and a pleasing labor to add to the

heap of materials already piled for his use ; and, therefore, even I, an humble worshipper of Shakspeare's genius, now venture to put forth some remarks upon this *Hamlet*, his most subtle and difficult work. They are feeble indications of ideas that have flashed across, or possessed my mind, the while I surrendered myself to the melancholy delight of poring over the play. All I can hope is, that peradventure they, in some sort, may possibly serve as hints of theories, capable of being wrought into things really and convincingly true and good, by men of learning and ability.

And now, without further preface, I address myself to my task.

I have said, that amongst Shakspeare's plays, *Hamlet* stands quite alone. True, there is a class to which it may be appropriately referred ; but, even here, I conceive it essentially and esoterically preserves its separateness : in other words, it is of the same order, but not of the same essence, with its fellows. These are, *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Cymbeline*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*. Were I to venture upon designating them as a class, I would borrow an epithet from Wordsworth, without applying it precisely in the

same manner, and style them "Dramas of the Imagination."

They are obviously distinct from all the other plays; they are of a higher and subtler quality, a more sublime and universal character, than the classical or the historical plays (I, of course, make no reference to the comedies); they are dramas that relate to *man*, and not to *men*—to the Lord of the Creation, considered abstractedly from all accessories and circumstances which would individualize him quite, give him not alone a personal but a local idiosyncrasy—and not to the demigod or demon of one particular age, or climate, or country, or caste of human beings. They are psychological dramas; their theme is the Mind of Man, his Reason, Understanding, Will, Powers, Passions. The operation of certain circumstances of the external world upon these serve to actualize and display them, and so create the drama. To effect this metaphysical exhibition, the agency of some brief, dry, cold, and, in other hands, incapable story of human life, or fragment of a story—some

"Tale of Love and Sorrow,
Of faithful Love, enduring Truth,"

or the opposite, or some quaint legend of supernatural

agency, or snatch of an old ballad on one driven distraught by filial cruelty, is enough for Shakspeare. Little cares he for the intrinsic value or congruity of the scanty materials that he seizes: he has seen that they be sufficiently vague to leave him unembarrassed by details of the earth earthy, and is sure to make them potent for the one great object he has in view, and to which everything else is but subsidiary. The probability of the story is to him a matter of no consideration; nay, he seems rather to delight in choosing subjects on which the improbable march of the physical events shall contrast strangely with the now exquisite, now appalling truth, of the mental developments. In other tragedies, in which he assumed the fetters of history, his fidelity to character and costume, in its wisest sense, of men who flourished, and the circumstances in which they lived, and moved, and had their being, is right marvellous. But in these dramas of the Imagination, the stories of the three—*Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Cymbeline*, are impossible; the stories of the remaining three improbable, to an extent, which renders them all but impossible. And yet, why attempt to draw distinctions amongst things wherein there can be, in truth, no difference?—all are alike physically and morally impossible. This must be

obvious to every body who may contemplate them, even invested as they are without all the witchery of divinest poesy, and rendered earnest, and awful, and soul-searching, by the interfusion of all of appropriate passion and power which the world we live in and the world of spirits could supply. It is rather difficult, then, to conceive that the fact escaped the observation of the Magician who picked up the dry, bare materials, to work his spell withal, or that he selected them such as they visibly, essentially, and unalterably were, without some special object. Ay, certainly it is difficult: but commentators delight in difficulties; and infinitely more, I do believe, in difficulties they create, than in those they overcome. The first flatter them with the show of originality! the second could only confer on them the notoriety of singularity. They have, accordingly, exhausted a vast deal of research in accusing, and now convicting, and again acquitting, Shakspeare, of misstating things which he, in sooth, invented—of failing to work out a moral which he never meant to draw, or intimate an intention to convey—of committing (to borrow the language of the old sentence-juggler, Johnson) “faults too evident for detection and too gross for aggravation,” when these faults lay inherent in the

story, and were in no sort to be avoided—of being guilty of inaccuracies, anachronisms, and blunders, which could not be, since all such are relative; and here they had nothing accurate, or fixed, or determined, to which they could refer. The very selection of the subject-matter of the Plots ought to have guarded the Poet against such criticisms: they are most disgustingly absurd—worse even than the comments on the *Institutes*, which Pantagruel characterized with a coarse but quaint felicity, that would make one stop the nostrils in deference to the learned giant's judgment could he do so the while he enjoyed a hearty laugh. In four of the tragedies, Shakspeare adopts antique and isolate fables, which bring him back to a period so remote that every thing is phantasmal—even time is a shadow. In another, he takes some snatches of a wild and barbaresque tale—that is *Othello*; and in *Romeo and Juliet*, he founds his exquisite drama of Love and Fate upon the catastrophe of an old and fond tradition. From the very circumstances, then, of his choice, I maintain that he set himself free from all the ordinary observances with respect to climate, country, manners, costume, and so forth—he passed into the land of Dream, far beyond all standards for such matters—he dealt

with the heart and brain of man, with "the seat of our reason and the seat of our affections." The only practical commentators, then, upon these, the most august of his creations, should be the Metaphysician and the Pathologist.

Flinging aside for the present your carping critics, I would now proceed to call attention to consequences that must necessarily follow from the choice of the materials. First to the scholar's eye that penetrates the outward show of things, and can conceive and comprehend the one idea which forms the initiative of the method* pursued with respect to them, there must be a genial similarity between these plays and the ancient Greek drama. In either case, the theme

* The word Method (*μέθοδος*) being of Grecian origin, first formed and applied by that acute, ingenious, and accurate people, to the purposes of Scientific arrangement, it is in the Greek language that we must seek for its primary and fundamental signification. Now, in Greek, it literally means *a way or path of transit*. Hence, the first idea of Method is *a progressive transition* from one step, in any course, to another; and where the word Method is applied with reference to many such transitions in continuity, it necessarily implies a Principle of Unity with Progression. But that which unites and makes many things *one* in the mind of man, must be an act of the mind itself—a manifestation of intellect, and not a spontaneous and uncertain production of circumstances. This act of the Mind, then—this leading thought—this "my note" of the harmony — this "subtle," cementing, subterraneous power (borrowing a phrase from the nomenclature of legislation), we may not inaptly call the Initiative of all Method.

of the story is purely mythic—a homeless fable, or a legend haunting some spot like the spirit of its dream; the subject of the poet is the soul and passions of man, stripped of the idiosyncrasy they might derive from the peculiar conformation of the mass of clay which was their instrument or their victim. Being both creations psychological, they treat of the mind, healthy and diseased—of the passions, urgent for good or evil—of the will, weakly, or potent to a miracle amongst the children of earth—of faculties, perverted, or devoted to the noblest uses. The Good and Evil which concurrently exist in every thing, like the *plus* and *minus* in a quadratic radical, are as calmly and as irrefragably displayed as they severally would be in an equation, after the manner in which you worked it. Impulses and motives are exhibited, as acting upon the mind according to their proper powers; and there, consequently, cannot be, in any case, what the commentators would regard as a moral. For, if we consider of it, how could there? It would go to prove there was no mixed nature, no freedom of Will: some beings should be all perfect; and Good in the world

“Should hold its icy current and compulsive course,
And keep due on.”

There would then, too, be no Fate, no Fortune: yet we ourselves sometimes make, sometimes mar both, as they do us. They are, in sooth, with us, and in us, and of us. Yet we fall by them; not (to speak in the tone of forlorn merriment, which, peradventure, for the wise man best befits such subjects) by any suicidal operation or spontaneous combustion, but by the conflict with others, in which the weaker spirit must always be quelled, or by the crash of circumstances, which physical in their origin, and partly physical in their quality, do yet act like a moral earthquake, laying all things prone—the auspices and the intellect of an Alexander, and the congenital baseness of a Thersites. In every great character, and in every great event, there is a tinge of Fatalism; and it is a dominant tinge, coloring all. This is most especially to be observed in the stories of Alexander, Cæsar, and Napoleon, the Earth's true demigods—in the men whom Nature, in the labor of centuries, produced with its dearest throes, and could not suffer to expire without a convulsion. And as in every great character and in every great event, so is there in every great work, a tinge of Fatalism. The plays of Shakspeare, whereof I speak, are the greatest works the world has yet known.

We know the misty sketches of dreams upon which the Englishman has written: they might be, in the modern vulgar parlance, styled Gothic. The pirns whereon the Greeks wind their weird-story are classic, small in number, inflected after the fancy of the poet, but that only—the glorious imagination of Prometheus, the first champion and martyr of liberty—"the tale of Troy divine"—the fated House of the Labdacidæ; these are the themes of all the Greek Dramatists. I shall have little to do practically save with the first of them, in every sense—Æschylus.

We have a complete trilogy from Æschylus. Now, it is a fancy of mine, that Shakspeare's psychological dramas and the ancient Greek dramas do alike severally resolve themselves into *tableaux*—(I regret being obliged to use the spurious word, but I fear there is none in our native English adequate to convey the same meaning.) This *tableau*, whether partaking of the qualities of Painting or of severer Sculpture, is, to my mind, a sort of embodiment of the moral resolution of the Drama: it is, "the be-all and the end-all," up from which and down to which every thing can be traced. It is the result of the dominant human passion, or mental aberration, or supernatural agency, actualized by circumstances. It is the ex-

pressed result in a particular case of the idea (using idea as the correlative law, and, therefore, as a rule laid down)—of the idea upon which the drama was constructed, which creates its unity, and regulates its progression through the throng of circumstances up to its fulfilment. It is the practical subject-matter of the play, as it would meet the outward eye. There is the murder, or the sacrifice, with its character, actors, and victims displayed: *that* existed in the physical world—it is a thing to be seen; the poet saw it with the visionary eye, the whilst, most probably in childhood, he heard the mythic legend of the primal gods, or of the doomed demigods of his race, or lay thrilled with a pleasurable awe as his nurse whispered him the witch-story of “Macbeth with the bloody hand;” or he read of Lear or Othello at his mother’s knee; or, probably enough, a sculptured group may have furnished forth immediately the theme of an Æschylean Drama. The how, and why, and wherefore this so-depicted event came to pass, it is the province of the play to detail and explain. We have, as I observe, a complete trilogy from Æschylus; and thence I take my illustration. The Dramas, in their order, are the *Agamemnon*, the *Choëphoræ*, the *Eumenides*. The murder

of the triumphant “King of Men” under his own roof-tree, the sacrifice of Clytemnestra, the purification of the Avenger from blood-guiltiness in its most appalling form, and the compact between the venerable Goddesses and the tutelar Divinities of Athens, are the themes of the trilogy; and each of these is embodied in its own *tableau*. At the close of the first (v. 245), by means of the *eccyclema*—ἐξώστρα or ἐκκυκλημα—the interior of the fatal bathing apartment was displayed; and there lay Agamemnon a corpse, and over him stood Clytemnestra the Murderess, and her Paramour. In the *Choëphoræ*, Orestes is seen, in like manner, standing over the corpses of his mother and Ægisthus (v. 946). These are subjects purely for sculptured groups; as, indeed, were always the *tableaux* presented by means of the *eccyclema*: as, for example again, in the *Antigone* of Sophocles, wherein Creon appears with dead Eurydice in his arms; and the *Ajax*, wherein the body of the distracted hero, surrounded by slaughtered sheep, was exhibited. There were never more than three or four figures. But in the *Eumenides* we have an exception; there is a large group—too large for the *eccyclema* a hundred fold—and yet properly, were it at all embodied by art, a sculptured group: Orestes, the blood-stained suppliant—

the Goddess of Wisdom presiding—the Eternal Furies—and “the God of Life, and Poesy, and Light,” as advocate for the Avenger. Into these *tableaux* severally the plays of the trilogy (and into the last the three plays—but that is beside my purpose) resolve themselves. The psychological dramas of Shakspeare invariably include, at the last, a *tableau* “terminating all;” and to which, and from which, every thing can be traced. Fate, the Inexorable, has been satisfied: the theorem has been worked out for good or evil. The *tableau* is the expressed solution of the theorem, and the Drama is its proof. In *Hamlet*, “the quarry that cries on, havoc!”—in *Othello*, “the tragic loading of the bed”—in *Romeo and Juliet*, the bloody sepulchre gorged with the brave and beautiful, the young and lovely—in *Cymbeline*, the gentle reunion, after many and sore trials, of lovers and kinsfolk long parted—in *Lear*, the apparition of the father with his murdered darling—in *Macbeth*, the ghastly head, the grinning mockery of fiend-fostered Ambition—these, with their accessories, do severally form the *tableaux*; and they are to the Greek *tableaux* as pictures would be to sculptured groups: for there be not a few personages, all of which are essentially important to express the story

of the event, but there be many, and of these the greater number are sketches. The Greek *tableaux* have all the stern, cold realism, of chiselled marble—the Shakspearean, much of the glow of painting, and something of the phantasmal character of its groups; both, however, we apprehend, must have been objects of great care and interest in the original representations. We know that this was the case on the Athenian stage. I believe it must have been so upon the early English, when “Masques and Triumphs” were held in high repute by the wise and great, as we have abundant reason to know they were in “Eliza’s golden reign.” Shakspeare’s plays, too, are replete with *tableaux*, which might be made highly effective. Many of the very short dialogues, in scenes that shift presently, were obviously introduced only to explain—to serve as posies to *tableaux*. The reader of Shakspeare will understand this, the mere playgoer can know nothing about it; he rarely sees more than two thirds of the characters and of the scenes in a drama: in fact, he enjoys little more than the mouthing of certain extracts, selected by incompetent persons.

It is by embodying and expressing *tableaux* such as these, or the incarnation of a Feeling, or a Passion, or a legendary Spirit, from its attributes, that the

arts of Sculpture and Painting become united with Poesy. Unless they can effect this, and be capable, after the manner Dick Tinto wished—or, I should say, imagined—his sketch to be, they are nothing worth; and those who made them, no better than fantastic stone-cutters, or painters and glaziers, misemploying their craft in making idle daubings upon canvass. It is, of all affectation of useless knowledge, the most paltry; though, from its very paltriness, it be little, if at all mischievous, to prate about difficulties overcome, of handicraft achievements in these matters—“the delicate chiselling of the stone, the fine classic flow of the drapery, the exquisite coloring, the masterly handling, the grand drawing, the mighty genius displayed upon bits,” together with the rest of the anthology of cant phrases in which your chimpanzee critic puffs out his article, with “an empty noddle and a brow severe.” Pah! “it smells in the nostrils.” Unless a picture or a piece of sculpture be capable and tell a story, and a heart-home story, it is but colored canvass or a chiselled stone.

Next, I would draw attention to the fact, that in dramas like unto these of which I have spoken, that are founded upon a *tableau*, there is (I care not how wild may be the story) a realism, which the

physical nature of the *tableau*, whether expressed, or capable of being embodied by any man at the instant, might seem to lend to them. Moreover, they are necessarily of a homogeneous character, and, therefore, are calculated to convey to the mind the impression of a perfect work, and to leave it quite satisfied with the conclusion, be it for the parties wherein the tale in its progress has interested you fortunate or miserable.

The mind of him who composed the work, and of him who reads it, must be alike impressed with a sense of fatalism; which, though it be awful, is yet wholesome and pleasurable to the Imagination. In illustration of these doctrines I have been propounding, permit me to refer to single examples, taken from the numerous works of writers who each enjoy a mighty reputation, not alone in their own countries, but throughout Europe—I mean, Sir Walter Scott and Victor Hugo. The examples I take are not dramas in form—they are not divided into acts and scenes—but they are, nevertheless, in the essence, dramatic: they are what dramas might be, if addressed to the mind of a man struck blind. The physical show of the several characters is described; the scenery is painted in “words that have hues”—words rich in

the magic of associations and memories, instead of being shadowed forth by a cold art upon canvass; actions and events, in like manner, are described with a poet's illimitable powers, and so conjured up before the visionary eye, instead of being represented on a narrow stage by poor creatures with painted faces and fantastic garments. And this is the difference: in one case, the drama is addressed to the mind and to the outward eye; in the other, it is addressed to the mind alone.

The romances I speak of are the *Bride of Lammermoor* and *Notre Dame de Paris*. The first is, in my judgment, pre-eminently the most Shakspearean of Sir W. Scott's works. I do not think I can give it higher or more appropriate praise. And this, it will be remembered, was constructed upon a *tableau* of four figures—a *tableau* that might have been represented by the *eccyclema*. There is the Master of Ravenswood, the brave, the true, the noble-hearted, who loves with all the overweening, the desperate, world-defying fondness, of one who has chosen very waywardly, and taken for his mate a gentle creature merely, whom he may cherish, protect, and elevate—who loves with all the fervor of the intellectual man, whose Will is indomitable, whose spirit never knew the chilling touch

of Fear. There is Lucy, who has felt the glory of that purest and most ennobling love, and returns it with the intensest worship of the heart. You dote upon her as you read her story, even as the Master might; for the whole business of her existence, apart from her persecutors, is grateful love! There is the representation of cold, blind, inapplicable Duty, in the person of the Presbyterian Minister; and in the Mother there is an embodiment of that spirit of Evil so constantly to be encountered upon Earth, which cannot endure the pure unconventional happiness of others, and that is ever in its restless malignity, disposed to be miserable itself, that it may make others miserable.

Now mark the effect produced upon this particular work of Scott's, by the origin and mode of its construction. Is it not, as a whole, the most harmonious in its parts, the most complete in its structure, of any one of the novels? It is a most deep tragedy. You have, however, from the first, been prepared for a catastrophe of Death and Doom; and you rise from its perusal with satisfaction, with a calmed mind, because you feel that the worst is over, that the Master and his spirit's mate "sleep well"—"nothing can touch them further;" and you know that your soul has been chastened and purified by that heavenly

sorrow in which there is no selfishness. Of all the other novels, I cannot remember one at the close of which you are under the influence of the same feelings. In many, abounding, too, with passages of the intensest interest—such as *Old Mortality*—you rise from the conclusion, which is slovenly, and abrupt, and unsatisfactory, like the breaking of a dream, with a sensation of unrest, if not of positive annoyance. Sir Walter Scott's mind was essentially illogical; he could not reason. His attempt to write Napoleon's history, and his miserable book on *Demonology and Witchcraft*, make this but too evident. He had a rich but discursive imagination. He saw every thing as he oftentimes might the beloved scenery of his native land, through a mist which at one time rendered the features indistinct, and at another lent them a faëry beauty. He was irregularly educated; he had little classical knowledge, and less of classic taste or feeling: indeed, he had little accurate knowledge upon any subject. He never read upon a system; his studies were never made to converge or concentrate upon one great object. He loved reading, not for the powers it confers upon man struggling to overtop the fellow-men of his generation in this world, but because it enabled him to conjure up a world of

his own: he was the minion of Romance, the ranger of the mountain and the heather; and they had from his infancy for him the choicest impulses. He had a fine and happy sense of the beauties and the grandeur of external nature, a noble feeling of chivalry, and a power of pathos scarcely surpassed by that of Shakspeare or of Homer. But all this was in the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*; and there never was any thing more since, in any one of his works, excepting only the *Bride of Lammermoor*. Scott had talent in the highest degree, but not much of absolute Genius; whereof, as Coleridge observes, it is a good gauge, or criterion, to observe whether it progresses and evolves, or merely spins upon itself.

The germ of every thing Scott has invented may be found in the Ballads. The sketches of all the characters he has created may be seen there; and they are few: he proceeded in an inverted order from that of Shakspeare. The writer of *Othello* and *Hamlet* went from causes to results: he took Passions, Faculties, and Feelings, and from these he made his man and fashioned his life; he worked from the abstract, as the Creator of all might do; he possessed the almighty intelligence, and a portion of this, as he listed, he inspired into the mass of clay he took, or declared

in his imagination. Scott, on the other hand, worked from the concrete; he went back from results to causes; he availed himself of an impersonation made from an actual man and circumstances of his life, with certain accessories furnished from the personalities, moral and physical, of other men and mark-worthy events of their story; and thence he came to shadow forth original and dominant Passions, Faculties, Feelings. It will be easily perceived, accordingly, why it was that Shakspeare excelled, even in reference to his own works, in the characters which he created purely; and that Scott was most successful in the characters he described. Let me be understood to mean by the characters described, the characters he has taken from history, dressed out in their attributes and memories, and made movers in a scene; or the characters he had himself received his instructions for (to borrow a lawyer's phrase), from personal observation in the circle of his acquaintance and in humbler life. These the romancer might easily form to the purposes of his story. But Shakspeare drew his *Othello* and *Hamlet* from no living model, from no traditional sketch; he wrought them forth from his own brain. It may be observed, too, that Scott's works are severally in the nature of collections of importraitures of passages

in the external world, and in human life; they are not interpenetrated by one great principle which concentrates them upon an object, the which being once attained, the mind is satisfied with the whole. They are like an opera, in which there are many exquisite melodies and concerted pieces, but which has no pervading theme wherewith the senses and imagination should be always possessed, and on the successive development of which the interest should be continuously increasing (as in *Fidelio*), until it ends with communicating that excitement which, for the moment, has raised you above the ordinary conditions of humanity; and on which, therefore, your memory loves to repose. Hence it is, I should presume, that all the attempts to dramatize Scott's novels have proved such lamentable failures. The only one which might have made a tragedy has, I believe, never been profaned by the scissors of the playwright. Yet I am not surprised at it: nobody but a man of high ability and delicate feeling could have done it; and with equal facility, and more honor, might such a person write a tragedy, which should be acknowledged all his own. The *Bride of Lammermoor* is, I do say, a grand fusion of a Shakspearean Tragedy. The dread spirit of the *tableau* on which it is founded is interfused throughout;

the Fatalism, the Supernatural Agency, the Mental Aberration, which necessarily occur in all the psychological works of Shakspeare, are in it—the lore of the heart as to mankind in all stations of life—the sense and relish of fun, which is electrically potent upon the reader—the wild admixture of humor and the most afflicting tragedy, as at the grave of Ophelia, are all there ! It is, if we will only consider it curiously, a marvellous work for Scott ; and mind, it is the only one made upon a *tableau*.

The author of the second romance to which I would refer has, in a preface, well explained how and under what state of feeling and inspiration a drama, or romance, should be composed. The one which he so introduces has been put forth in the right spirit :

“ Un roman selon lui naît, d'une façon en quelque sorte nécessaire, avec tous ses chapitres ; un drame naît avec toutes ses scènes. Ne croyez pas qu'il y ait rien d'arbitraire dans le nombre de parties dont se compose ce tout, ce mystérieux microcosme que vous appelez drame, ou roman. La greffe et la soudure prennent mal sur des œuvres de cette nature, qui doivent jaillir d'un seul jet et rester telles quelles. Une fois la chose faite, ne vous ravisez pas, n'y retouchez plus. Une fois que le livre est publié—une fois que le sexe de l'œuvre, virile ou non, a été reconnu et proclamé—une fois que l'enfant a poussé son premier cri, il est né, la voila, il est ainsi fait, père ni mère n'y peuvent plus rien, il appartient à l'air et au soleil laissez le vivre ou mourir comme il est. Votre livre, est-il manqué ? Tant pis. N'ajoutez pas de chapitres à un livre manqué. Il est incomplet. Il fallait le compléter en l'en-

grendant. Votre arbre est noué? Vous ne le redresserez pas. Votre roman est phthisique, votre roman n'est pas viable? Vous le nui rendrez pas le souffle qui lui manque. Votre drame est né boiteux? Croyez moi, ne lui mettez pas de jambes de bois."

These are Victor Hugo's opinions respecting the mode after which a romance should be sent forth, and certainly he has acted upon his own fair ideal with respect to *Notre Dame de Paris*. And it is, in the essence, as complete a dramatic work as any wrought forth by a Greek Tragedian. He says himself, he made it upon the word, 'ΑΝΑΓΚΗ—Fate. Of course, every great work of Fiction has been founded upon Fate: but he also made it upon another word, from whence it took its peculiar form and color; and that word, also inscribed upon the wall of the dark student's cell, is 'Αναγκεία, whose causality upon the lives and fortunes of all the leading characters is the minister of Fate. I say, leading characters, to distinguish them from characters which, in the *Bride of Lammermoor* and *Notre Dame de Paris*, are rather ancillary than belong to the dramatic working-out of the composition, and, in some sort, discharge the functions of the Chorus in a Greek Play. The leading characters are few, and upon all these the stern decrees of Fate are executed, through the agency and impulses of 'Αναγκεία—of Uncleanness, Lust, or, let us

mitigate the expression, animal Passion. The Romance, too, is formed upon a *tableau*; and a most fearful one. The dark towers of the mystic cathedral frown upon the scene, which is inspired by its terrible spirit, inscrutable, but everywhere felt. Its own familiars, too, the familiars of that dread Gothic pile, are the prominent figures. It is prefigured and explained in the following passages. It is fulfilled at the last, when the poor little dancer of the *Parvis* is suspended from the gallows, with the executioner on her shoulders, and the devoted children of the cathedral—all three the victims of animal Passion—are contemplating the fearful group, “*ce groupe épouvantable de l’homme et de la jeune fille—de l’araignée et de la mouche.*”

“Dom Claude abîmé en lui-même, ne l’écoutait plus. Charmolue, en suivant la direction de son regard, vît qu’il s’était fixé machinalement à la grande toile d’araignée qui tapissait la lucarne. En ce moment une mouche étourdie que cherchait le soleil de Mars, vint se jeter à travers ce filet et s’y englua. A l’ébranlement de sa toile, l’énorme araignée fit un mouvement brusque hors de sa cellule centrale, puis d’un bond elle se précipita sur la mouche, qu’elle plia en deux avec ses antennes de devant, tandis que sa trompe hideuse lui fouillait la tête. Pauvre mouche ! dit le procureur du roi, en cour d’église ; et il leva la main pour la sauver. L’archidiacre, comme réveillé en sursaut lui, retint le bras avec une violence convulsive.

“ ‘Maître Jacques,’ s’écria-t-il, ‘laissez faire la fatalité.’

“ Le procureur se retourna effaré ; il lui semblait qu’une pince

de fer lui avait pris le bras. L'œil du prêtre était fixé, hagard, flamboyant, et restait attaché au petit groupe horrible de la mouche et de l'araignée.

“ ‘Oh ! oui,’ continua la prêtre, avec une voix qu'on eût dit venir de ses entrailles, ‘voilà un symbole de tout. Elle vole : elle est joyeuse, elle vient de naître, elle cherche le printemps, le grand air, la liberté ; oh, oui ! mais qu'elle se heurte à la rosace fatale, l'araignée en sort, l'araignée hideuse. Pauvre danseuse ! pauvre mouche prédestinée ! Maître Jacques, laissez faire ; c'est la fatalité ! Hélas ! Claude, tu es l'araignée ! Tu es la mouche aussi ! Tu volais à la science, à la lumière, au soleil, tu n'avais souci que d'arriver au grand air, au grand jour de la vérité éternelle ; mais en te précipitant vers la lucarne éblouissante, qui donne sur l'autre monde, sur le monde de la clarte, de l'intelligence, et de la science, mouche aveugle ! docteur insensé ! tu n'avais pas vu cette subtile toile d'araignée tendue par le destin entre la lumière et toi ! tu, t'y es jeté à corps perdu, misérable fou ! et maintenant tu le débats, la tête brisée, et les ailes arrachées, entre les antennes de fer de la fatalité ! Maître Jacques, maître Jacques, laissez faire d'araignée ! ’ ”

Victor Hugo has written several dramas, and other novels, but nothing like *Notre Dame de Paris* ; which is decidedly a noble and an august composition. A romance of the middle ages—it is in force, power, variety—gracefulness in the multifarious outline—grotesqueness occasionally wild yet harmonious—beauty, quaint and delicate beauty, in the details—and magnificence and massiveness in the whole—like unto one of those grand cathedrals in which these ages expressed their intellect, imbodyed their genius. Formed upon the principle *ἀναγκη*, the agent *ἀναγκεία*, and the *tableau* into which they resolve themselves to

conclude the tale, nothing can be more perfect, and, consequently, more simple, than the structure of the plot. Fancy and Imagination, and the powers of gorgeous illustrations, which in his other works run wild, are herein controlled to their appropriate purposes, and rendered most efficient. All his knowledge, all his personal experience, all his learning, have been heaped upon the *tableau* of this romance; and, strictly guided by the Principle and the Agent I have mentioned, they have in no sort encumbered it. But it is the one and only work of the man's life: his whole soul is there. Were we to estimate his capabilities by the gauge of any other of his compositions, we should say that for him, and for a man of his time of life moreover, the work was miraculous. He is yet young. In the filling up of *Notre Dame de Paris* the faults are glaring, the plagiaries innumerable, and annoying because useless, the author being always best when he depends upon himself; yet the unity of the design, and the circumstance of his quaint knowledge—architectural, and antiquarian, and historical—his magic powers of expression, and his powers of delineating, in the spirit of a metaphysician and pathologist, the workings of the inward Mind, as well as marshalling before the eye the features of external

Nature, being all rendered ancillary to that design, even the characters he takes (which are in no sort original) compel you to forget every thing respecting the materials and the mere process of construction, and to regard only the whole structure and its result, as you must do, with unmixed admiration. The simple earnestness of the Design, the soul of his *tableau*, reconciles to probability, under the aspect and by the medium through which you are compelled to view them, the traditional exaggeration of Romance—the magician, the monster, and the angel in woman's flesh. There be, moreover, in the formation of Claude Frollo, Quasimodo, and La Esmeralda, recollections of Faust, Manfred, Lewis's monk, De Bois Guilbert; of all the man-monsters of Hugo's own menagerie; of La Preciosa, Rebecca, and a host of other lovely and most exquisite damsels of despised castes—jews, gipsies, and the like—at whose birth, there was a social miracle—Art, and Circumstance, and Education, having been dispensed with in the creation of a Charmer. All was left to Nature—

“ And Nature said, now will I make
A ladye of my own.”

But Notre Dame has made them, one and all, her

own. The archdeacon—the gentleman, the scholar, the noble specimen in every respect, mental and physical, of the “paragon of animals”—the beloved child, into whom the mystic soul of the dread edifice of gramarye has been inspired—and the brutal bell-ringer — the Foundling—the creature whose very humanity is doubtful from his savage appearance, and whose intellect is smothered from the lack of conduits, whose community is only with the rude and grotesque materials of the structure, apart as they (Claude and Quasimodo) would seem, are yet together as familiars of the cathedral. They are like the *plus* and *minus* in a quadratic radical. The *ἀναγκη* of *Notre Dame de Paris* is over both, as it is over the poor little flutterer of the *Parvis*; the instant *ἀναγνεία* is instilled into the soul and senses of the three, it impels them to their fate: they severally become each the other’s destiny, and the dramatic Romance gushes forth to its fulfilment in the *tableau*, over which Fate hovers satisfied. You feel that nothing touching the victims has been overstrained—that all has terminated as it necessarily should.

I shall make no apology for instituting a comparison between the Greek dramatic works and things

so different in outward form and show, because upon reflection it must be evident, that true likeness depends upon the intrinsic qualities, and not upon the apparent qualities, of such matters. I have not hesitated, then, to predicate, that there is an analogy between the two Romances and the Greek Drama, and an essential resemblance between the Greek Drama and the psychological plays of Shakspeare. The form of the structure was departed from, and, doubtless, with advantage, considering the different circumstances and climate under which the scenic representation was to take place. But, to speak figuratively, the spirit of the old Greek drama, when its august fane was in all its exquisite and harmonized proportions laid prostrate, came to furnish forth the living soul of a Gothic temple, which, though irregular on occasions even to grotesqueness, is nevertheless grand and enduring — better suited to the climate in which it has been reared, and the genius of the people who are to be its worshippers. Here Shakspeare was the Hierophant, and in himself he united the several excellences of the ancient Masters — the lyric flow of Euripides, the wise tenderness of Sophocles, together with all the vigor of Æschylus, and his power of dealing with the dim supernatural—

of intimating it darkly, and yet weaving it as the fatal thread into the woof of his story.

Now, if we were to inquire why it was, and how it was, that this intrinsic similarity was brought about, I think it would appear to have resulted from the circumstance of Madness and Supernatural Agency—family legends and popular superstitions—together with Fatalism, of course, being the dominant intrinsic qualities, and being used as the most potent materials in the construction of the Shakspearean as well as the ancient Greek Dramas.

It has been long since, and very frequently observed, that Madness, especially in the milder and less declared forms (such as *mania mitis monomania*, and every thing coming under the head Melancholy), has been prevalent in England. Humorists have always abounded in every walk of society, even in the persons of those whose sanity was allowed. Pinel, the greatest writer upon Insanity of the present day, remarks the melancholy richness of the English tongue in epithets to describe and characterize every form and variety of Madness. And certainly we bear, with good humor, allusion to the prevalence of mental disorder amongst us. Nobody, however patriotic, is offended when the Grave-digger tells the

Prince of Denmark that young Hamlet, being mad, was sent into England, or at the reasons he assigns for it.

Ham. Ay, marry, why was he sent into England?

1st Clown. Why, because he was mad. He shall recover his wits there ; or, if he do not, 'tis no great matter there.

Ham. Why?

1st Clown. 'T will not be seen in him there ; there the men are as mad as he."

It has at all times, moreover, been the fashion to introduce mad people in our Dramas. It was done freely enough in the ancient drama, sometimes with great effect, by learned men ; and the practice has been continued to the present time, though not with the same good results. It is a dangerous matter for mere playwrights to handle : the only genuine mania you can perceive is in the overweening presumption of the writer ; there is none in his character. Yet, notwithstanding the many notable instances of absurd failure, and the pleasant objurgations of Sheridan's Puff, the heroine of our modern tragedies continues to go punctually mad in white muslin, and the hero to rant, and roar, and attitudinize, after a manner not very common amongst Bedlamites.

The introduction, too, visibly as well as by dread intimation of supernatural agency, is common in our drama. The character of the people, so sombre and

so superstitious as it really is, and as Mirabeau saw it was; so intensely earnest, and, in the healthiest of such morbid activity—the character of the constitution—that free constitution, capable of elasticity, and controllable by resistance, without absolute and irreparable injury, have led in no small degree to this. Our stage, I do believe, has, like our country, enjoyed greater freedom than any other. Certainly, even in the old monkish times at least, at high solemnities, great latitude was allowed; and, since the Reformation, there has been no vexatious meddling with the Drama here upon religious grounds. Indeed, if there were, it would have been impossible that matters of abstract and occult Philosophy could have been so freely discussed, or the vagaries of the mind diseased so faithfully depicted. But in England there has well nigh, at all times, been the freedom to represent the madman from actual observation: and the existing superstitions of the country, and its story, which had a vague and dim but yet thrilling touch of reality about them for spectators of every class, were interwoven with the play. In other countries it was different—whilst retaining the form, they quite lost the spirit of the old Greek drama; which, be it remembered, was represented under free insti-

tutions (that is, free for citizens, I think not of slaves), and without a grinding censorship. In that old Greek Drama, "the noble mind o'erthrown" was, in tragedy, exhibited as a fitting subject for contemplation; and the freaks and foibles of mania, in any mitigated form, as a proper theme for laughter in comedy. Personal peculiarities, moreover, were held up to ridicule; and the characters, even when not portraits, were drawn from Nature. In Greece, too, great latitude was allowed upon the stage, with respect to the doctrines and dogmas of Religion. The "happy gods, living listlessly at their ease"—*μακάρες θεοὶ ρεῖα ζῶντες*—were treated with that indifference they were supposed to entertain. Prosecutions for blasphemy were always political, or deadly personal. But in countries wherein, contrariwise from its free condition in England, the drama was subjected to the screw of censorship, religious and political, it took the classic shape, which, in my opinion, is fitting for no scenic representation except the lyric drama; and I have some degree of belief, that the old Greek plays were performances in which music and spectacle bore a large part, were in a word, what operas at the Académie Royale ought to be, at the best you could conceive them. The unities, be it

observed, are embarrassing only when you come to give a drama as a recited poem, and as the French did in their tragedies, in one measure; without the transition to the metre of the ode, without any relief from variety. None of the intrinsic qualities, however, of the ancient Drama remained; and it is curious to remember that disquisitions touching supernatural agency and the art magical held by mimic characters on the English stage, were actually, at the same time debated solemnly in the Sorbonne and the convents. Thus questions, which in the one kingdom were matters of perilous doubt to learned Doctors and Christian Prelates, were in the other, at the Poet's inspiration, bandied about upon a stage, from mouth to mouth, by excommunicated persons—the offscouring of society—with painted faces and an antic dress. Ay, and after Macbeth and Hamlet, with all their forlorn metaphysical reasoning and supernatural terrors, had long been exhibited to the gaping English million, the curate Grandier, under the courtly reign of Louis XIV., and intellectual rule of Cardinal Richelieu, by the immediate agency of Dignitaries Ecclesiastical and Legal, was condemned to death, and burnt at Loudon, for sorcery, upon the testimony of some lewd nuns and perjured friars.

But in Shakspeare's time, peculiarly of all others in England, there was a vast deal of profound learning upon almost all subjects, and men of the mightiest intellect flourished. It was a great age. The English of that day possessed all the noble qualities of their Norman forefathers, the unconquerable warriors by sea and land—refined by courtesy and sublimed by learning—the same wild spirit of adventure—the same enterprise—the same endurance; and, with these, the greatest genius which has ever yet been displayed in any era of the world's story. The monuments of the famed Augustan age cannot, in truth, compete with those of the Elizabethan; it can boast two minds that, in Lord Byron's words, "might furnish forth the universe." Bacon might dispute the palm of Genius, and its particular imbodiment, Poesy, with Shakspeare himself; Bacon understood and exemplified Philosophy; Shakspeare understood and illustrated it: Bacon, in his explanations, delighted us with the qualities and graces of Poesy; Shakspeare, in his poetry, gives us the results and operations of all philosophy, as it bears upon human life. Now, naturally enough, from the deep and sterling learning which prevailed, the age was addicted greatly to metaphysical disquisitions,

and therefore, to psychological inquiry, and to investigation and observation with respect to all mental derangement. Likewise, all scholars were curious touching Demonology and Witchcraft—themes of study always intensely interesting, but which James I., on his accession, had, whilst Shakspeare was yet writing, rendered fashionable.

In Shakspeare's psychological works, we find the consecrated essence of all the learning of the time upon both these forlorn and fearful themes of study.

With regard to Madness—as, indeed, with regard to all other subjects dilated on—Shakspeare appears not alone to have exhausted for his results (and they are invariably correct) all the learning of those who went before him, but to have anticipated all that has since been heaped together. All our subsequent discoveries and conclusions wrung from study and observation, up to this moment—even to the remarks which I am about to suggest, only tend to prove the perfect accuracy of Shakspeare's delineations, and to establish the existence of that degree of knowledge in him which would seem properly to be that of a creator. Sir Henry Hallford, in an ingenious and highly interesting essay on the Homeric wounds, showed how strangely accurate the old Greek

was in this description of injuries to the human frame, and the consequences that were the result, physiologically and anatomically. The same might be proved of Shakspeare, in reference to the human body and its ills; and we find the knowledge extended also to the mind diseased. He produces a mad person before you, and without explaining why or wherefore, or reasoning upon the course to be pursued, or making the slightest discernible effort at effect, he just makes that madman say and do precisely what he ought to have said and done, laboring under a particular species of Insanity, acted upon by particular feelings and passions, and surrounded by particular circumstances. There is, meanwhile, an intuitive action of the Understanding, which tells you that the thing has been done, the individual man has been made, and Reason sees "that it is good." In this there is exhibited, at the same time, a consciousness of power and a conviction of success. At all times, too, we may remark in Shakspeare that abhorrence of exaggeration, with the view to produce effect, which is common to all gentlemanly natures. It has been styled, happily enough, by painters, in reference to the figures of Velasquez and Murillo, "quiet power." It is pre-eminent in Shakspeare; and in

no respect is it more wonderfully exhibited to the thoughtful eye, than in his delineation of madmen. The best institutions for the cure of madness, the best writers on the subject, the most successful practitioners in cases of insanity (such as Pinel and Esquirol), are now-a-days to be found in France; knowledge has accumulated: the theme of mental derangement, connecting itself with so many diseases, has, of course, become common amongst French playwrights, who have set about dramatizing the Nosology; and they have introduced mad people in abundance in their plays, "and yet never a good one," though they have striven hard for it. Shakspeare, on the contrary, has never once swerved in the accuracy of his delineations. He has, in his plays, introduced persons suffering under insanity in various forms, and so drawn the disease in various types. These, one and all, may, with a single exception, be referred forthwith to their proper head in the Nosology.

In several of his plays, too, Shakspeare has introduced supernatural agency; and a boding strain may be observed to pervade all his tragic works of the highest order. In these, the greatest monuments of human genius illustrative of the puzzle called human life, the indication of superhuman influence

is always to the student solemnly awful, if not absolutely appalling. The actual production of visitants from another world on the stage is made effective (I speak not of the closet, or the visionary eye). It is not in the power of mock realism—of the paltry show of actors and of a stage, to mar the power of the witches in *Macbeth*, or the ghost of Hamlet's father. With the exception of *Hamlet*, all the plays of Shakspeare, whether supernatural agency or insanity enter into their composition and the current of events, are straightforward plays. The heroes and heroines are men and women; you may like them or dislike them; and in doing either you have, according to your own lights, intelligible grounds whereon to proceed, because you can understand them: you can perceive and appreciate, to a sufficient extent, their motives, and so satisfy yourself as to the reasons and circumstances which conduced to the catastrophe of the play. A man, though scant well learned in the Nosology, can refer the insanity of each individual to its particular head, and each and every of his actions and words to the peculiar form of malady. The object, too, of the demoniac influence is apparent, and regularly worked out to its

natural and appointed conclusion; so is the operation and resolution of the dominant passion—Love, Ambition, Jealousy—fully set forth, thoroughly explained. Take *Othello*, *Lear*, *Macbeth*. In the first, there is little more than an intimation of the oracles of Fate; yet they are not, from the very commencement, in the least doubtful. The “ill-starred wench” must have been miserable in her unnatural match; the noble Moor appears before us a predestined sacrifice. The conclusion quite satisfies you. There should not, and there could not, have been any other. “King Lear” you can perfectly understand. It is a grand pathological study for the medical reader, and would seem to have been, in some sort, a pathological exercise for the poet; for almost every incident of terror or pathos is made to bear directly upon some distinct point in the gradual and clearly-defined progress of the malady. In *Macbeth* it is plain-sailing enough; the demoniac agency only ministered to his cherished wishes. The end may be divined, the conclusion was inevitable.

Incidentally, too, I may remark, that, in the comedies, Mania is always brought in judiciously and pleasantly, from its mildest form, in the outrageous

lying of the "starved Justice Shallow," to the gentle melancholy of Jaques, and the inordinate vanity of Malvolio.

But nothing of all this can be predicated of *Hamlet*; and though, as I have already observed, standing in the same class with the psychological dramas, it is nevertheless apart from them one and all. Yet, peradventure, doth it more nearly in the spirit resemble a play of Æschylus than any of the others; it might have been represented on an Athenian stage with as much facility as the *Eumenides*. Like the *Eumenides*, moreover, it is a ghastly play; and this without its solemn and religious conclusion, heart-awing to the people of Theseus, as a memory and an omen. Oh! *Hamlet* is a ghastly play—cold as a philosophical experiment; cold, I should rather say, as a demonstration, the subject being the mind diseased. The Spirit of Love is most potent throughout all the other tragedies of the Passions and Imagination—Love, which springs in its purity from the Reason, and to which the Senses only minister—Love, which, as the highest faculty of Reason, distinguishes Man from Brute (for brutes have Understanding as well as we, but they have not Reason, nor, therefore, have they Love)—Love, which, I repeat, distinguishes

man from brute; and Angels, as we are taught, in its degree from one another.

It is “stronger than death” in Juliet and her Romeo, in Desdemona and the Moor, in the poor mad father, Lear. It sheds a melancholy glory upon the blood-polluted victims of Ambition: it assumes an incarnation of Divinity, in the true wife, in sweetest Imogene. At the end of these tragedies, Love, bursting from the elements of destruction, hovers over all invincible and triumphant; and this is balm to the soul. It is better medicine than Hope, the false stimulant which remained to console Pandora: for what is Hope but anticipated Joy, the disturber of the Present, the plunderer of the Future? This, on the contrary, makes sorrow heavenly for that gone by, and leaves no care for that which is to come. Hereby the great end of Tragedy has been fulfilled, which Aristotle, or some other ancient sage, did well declare to be *Καθαρσις τῶν παθημάτων*—a purification of the passions.

And tragedy has been described to be “an exhibition tending, by the operation of pity and fear, to purify these and similar passions.” This is not done by *Hamlet*; and for this reason, also, *Hamlet* stands quite alone amongst Shakspeare’s plays. The Spirit

of Love is weakest in *Hamlet*, and, therefore, it commands but little human sympathy. Ophelia does love, and she dies. There is a majesty in her gentleness, which you worship with a gush of feeling in her earlier scenes of the play; the painful nature of her appearances, whilst mad, makes you feel that death is a release; and that release comes in an appropriate form—the gentle, uncomplaining, sorrow-stricken lady, dies gently, and without a murmur of bitterness or reproach :

“*Queen.* Your sister’s drowned, Laertes.

Laer. Drowned! Oh! where?

Queen. There is a willow grows ascaunt the brook,
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream;
There with fantastic garlands did she come,
Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples,
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
But our cold maids do dead men’s fingers call them;
There on the pendent boughs her coronet weeds
Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke,
When down her weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook: her clothes spread wide,
And mermaid-like, awhile they bore her up;
Which time she chanted snatches of old tunes,
As one incapable of her own distress,
Or like a creature native and endued
Unto that element: but long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay
To muddy death.”

The meek lady is no more, but the tragedy proceeds.

As for all the other characters, they are of a very mixed nature indeed, with two exceptions. Of Hamlet, as a personage in the drama, I do not now speak (and character, which, in its proper sense, is a completely fashioned Will, he had none), and the exceptions I make are Fortinbras and Horatio; of whom, the first is a magnificent sketch of a chivalrous prince—a youthful Alexander; the second, the noblest gentleman ever drawn. As for the remaining characters, you cannot esteem any, you cannot respect some; some you must laugh at; some you must despise; and even Horatio and Fortinbras have little sympathy from us, albeit they have the while entire admiration—they are so secure, so perfect in themselves, so elevated by the force of their own Will above the ordinary conditions of humanity. I may here, too, avail myself of the opportunity to observe, that, for a play so bloody for the English vulgar, and in itself so morally tragic for the scholar and the gentleman, *Hamlet* is for both, in its performance on the stage, strangely beholden to spectacle, and to its comic scenes, or snatches of scenes: the visible show of the ghost—the processions—funeral—squabble at Ophelia's grave—fencing-match—and, at the last, the “quarry that cries, on, havoc!” have much power

over the common spectator. I doubt if he could abide it without these, and without having Polonius buffooned for him, and, to no small extent, Hamlet himself; as he always was, whenever I saw the part played, and as the *great critic*, Dr. Johnson, would seem to think he ought to be. For he says, “the pretended madness of Hamlet *causes much mirth ! ! !*” And this he follows up by adding, in grandiloquent maudlin, “the mournful distraction of Ophelia fills the heart with tenderness, *and every personage produces the effect intended*; from the apparition that, in the first act, chills the blood with horror, to the fop in the last, that exposes affectation to just contempt.” So that in defiance of poor Ophelia’s eloquent lamentation over

“Th’ expectancy and rose of the fair state,”

we may, upon the authority of the doctor, conclude, that to cause much mirth by pretended madness was an effect intended to be produced by the personage, Hamlet. But throwing aside this grave folly, let me observe, that even the man who really can feel, if not quite understand the play, which Johnson did not understand and could not feel—the man who can perceive if he cannot quite comprehend its idea,

must perceive how essential to the conduct of the plot, and the development of character, is the forlorn merriment which pervades the drama; and how different this is from the comedy introduced in the other psychological dramas, which to some may seem impertinent and wearisome, and to none useful, save as a strong contrast, like a coarse dash of paint in a picture upon some one part, to bring out an effect elsewhere upon the canvass. But in *Hamlet* the intermixture is a very marvel of art. In that astounding scene at Ophelia's grave, the coarse "quips, and cranks, and gibes" of the grave-diggers, come in like discords in one of the most sublime and weird of Beethoven's compositions.

The praise of variety has been challenged for *Hamlet*, and with great justice, both as respects the incidents, the characters, and the nature of the scenes. As a consequence of this, we find that all those matters, severally difficult of treatment in other plays—as insanity, supernatural agency, subtle passions—are introduced in a still more difficult form in *Hamlet*. The cause and description of Ophelia's madness are plain enough. But Hamlet's madness, if he be mad, or his conduct, if not mad, as well as the management of the ghost and his powers,

have as yet been riddles; and neither is the progress of events clear, nor do they indicate the catastrophe to which they lead—nor, being thereat arrived, are you content they should have done so under the circumstances—nor is the conclusion in any sort or sense whatever satisfactory, but dreadfully the reverse.

In a word, *Hamlet*, to my mind, is essentially a psychological exercise and study. The hero, from whose acts and feelings every thing in the drama takes its color and pursues its course, is doubtless insane, as I shall prove hereafter. But the species of intellectual disturbance, the peculiar form of mental malady, under which he suffers, is of the subtlest character. The hero of another of these dramas, King Lear, is also mad; and his malady is traced from the outbreak, when it became visible to all, down to the agony of his death. But we were prepared for this malady—the predisposing cause existed always; it only wanted circumstance to call it forth. Shakspeare divined and wrote upon the knowledge of the fact, which has since been proclaimed formally by the physician, that it is with the mind as with the body: there can be no local affection without a constitutional disturbance—there can be no constitutional disturbance without a local affection.

Thus, there can be no constitutional disturbance of the mind, without that which is analogous to a local affection of the body, namely, disease, or injury affecting the nervous system and the mental organs—some previous irregularity in their functions, or intellectual faculties, or in the operation of their affections and passions; and, again, general intellectual disturbance will always be accompanied by some particular affection. But I am using well nigh the words of Esquirol. He says, “*Presque tous,*” (and by this qualification he only intends to exclude those in whom he had not the means of ascertaining the fact)—“*Presque tous les aliénés confiés à mes soins avoient offert quelques irrégularités dans leur fonctions, dans leur facultés intellectuelles, dans leur affections, avant d’être malades, et souvent de la première enfance. Les uns avoient été d’un orgueil excessif, les autres très colérés; ceux-ci souvent tristes, ceux-là d’une gaieté ridicule; quelques-uns d’une instabilité désolante pour leur instruction, quelques autres d’une application opiniâtre à ce qu’ils entreprennoient, mais sans fixité; plusieurs vétilleux minutieux, craintifs, timides, irresolus; presque tous avoient eu une grande activité de facultés intellectuelles et morales qui avoient redoublés d’énergie quelque temps*

avant l'accès ; la plupart avoient eu des maux des nerfs ; les femmes avoient épreuves des convulsions ou de spasmes hystériques ; les hommes avoient été sujets à des crampes, des palpitations, des paralysies. Avec ces dispositions primitives ou acquises, il ne manque plus qu'une affection morale pour déterminer l'explosion de la fureur ou l'accablement de la mélancolie."

Now, in all Shakspeare's insane characters, however slight may be the mental malady, with the exception only of Hamlet, we have accurately described to us the temperament on which madness is ingrafted. Thus, of Malvolio, who on his introduction to us, shows the intolerant vulgarity and impertinence of the upstart, combined with the wisdom of the menial—with cunning at least—and the chattering of proverbs, gravely on occasion, we hear from Maria: "The devil a puritan that he is, or any thing constantly, but a time-pleaser—an affectioned ass, that cons state without book, and utters it by great swarths; the best persuaded of himself—so crammed, as he thinks, with excellences, that it is his ground of faith that all that look on him love him: and on that vice in him will my revenge find notable cause to work." And from this we can well see

how little provocation it required to drive him beside himself, and into that most contemptible alienation of mind which springs from inordinate vanity and sordid selfishness. Of Jaques we learn that he had been a debauchee, "as sensual as the brutish sting itself." He is satiated quite—is now naturally enough struck with a gentle melancholy—"with a most humorous sadness." Goneril, too, prepares us for Lear's madness: "The best and soundest of his time has been but rash; then must we look to receive from his age, not alone the imperfections of long-ingrafted condition, but therewithal the unruly waywardness that infirm and choleric years bring with them." But of Hamlet alone we have no account of any positive predisposing cause to mania, or faulty temperament; nor can we catch from the lips of any third person any thing which might lead us to question his sanity before the commencement of the play. All is to his praise. He is the esteemed of Fortinbras, the friend of Horatio, the beloved of Ophelia. We are abruptly brought to contemplate the noble nature warped, the lofty mind o'erthrown, the gentleman "in his blown youth blasted with ecstasy." To comprehend and account for this, we must study the drama with the same pervading sweep

of thought that we would passages in human life, occurring within our observation, from which we wished to wring a meaning, and by which we hoped to solve a mystery. There is nothing beyond to look to. We must judge Hamlet by what he said and did: I open the volume in which this is recorded.

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